**Nicolae Steinhardt**

# Bestowing Your Will Achieve

## - Words of Faith -

"The ways to access to Christ are infinitely diverse. He chooses as honored vessels people who are totally different and inadequate – at a fist glance – to serve Him: a debauched as Fr. Augustine, a harsh officer as Ignatius of Loyola, a sorcerer as Saint Cyprian, as vitalist poet as Paul Claudel (overwhelmed by grace while hiding himself behind a pillar within Nôtre Dame Cathedral from Paris), a rebel, a contestant as the poet Arthur Rimbaud, a rebel as F. M. Dostoyevsky (in his Siberian prison), or as Silvio Pellico (in his Moravian dungeon), or as Evgenia Simionova Ginzburg in her arctic concentration camp where she had the occasion to offer bread to her enemy, and thus she fulfilled Christ's commandment towards the investigator who beat her and who tormented her in that concentration camp, and who later ended to be himself a prisoner in that concentration camp, a profoundly knower Hellenist as the Jew Simone Veil, an eminent student of the phenomenologist philosopher Husserl (as also the Jew woman Edith Stein who was later martyr and canonized by the Roman-Catholic Church), and atheist stranger to any religious preoccupations (as André Frossard, in that church where he entered only for seeking shelter against the rain while waiting for a friend who was late; he is the author of the destructive formula usually attributed to Laplace – God is an inutile hypothesis: only God exists, all the rest is but a hypothesis), a Jew, a declared enemy of the Christianity as Alphonse Ratisbonne (upon him miraculously operated a medallion representing the Mother of the lord, forcedly accepted by him only because of wanting to be polite), a socialist erudite as Charles Péguy (attracted by Jesus after the soul crisis he experienced during a big political and judiciary scandal, and by studying the life of Joanna d'Arc, the virgin-hero-women of France), an Indian as Sadhu Sundar Singh (he dared to menace Jesus that he will commit suicide if Jesus don't show Himself to him – and the lord listened to him!), an actress of the boulevard-like Parisian theaters (Eva Lavaliere), or another actress, that Spanish woman from the XVII Century who, by after playing the character of a nun she never wanted after to get off those monastic clothes and form the stage she went directly to the monastery of the respective order, crossing through the crown of the kneeled down rows of spectators, an actor (who parodied in Rome, during the persecutions, the scene of the Christian baptism and to whom that simulacre of baptism became an officiation of the Mystery of the Holy Baptism – and he died like a martyr), a skeptical writer as our illustrious compatriot Eugene Ionesco who reached to know and to love God at his old age, after attentively reading the Holy Fathers and by keeping to follow the Light."

**Nicolae Steinhardt**

In sermons (especially), in the theological articles (also) let's not commit the grave error of confounding the stylistic platitude to the Orthodoxy. The demon of the slogans and of the ecclesiastical stereotypy is equally real and virulent like its twin brother form literature; it stalks all the hierarch ds, all the priests, and all the monks, walking around restless and searching for whom to swallow, to compromise, and to sterilize. The best and nicest feelings or the most useful teachings are annihilated by the verbal stereotypy, that is a symptom of laziness, of fear, and of hearts dryness. Equally enmity present the teaching-like style – edifier -, unctuous, emphatic, grandiloquent, or the comfortable habit to reduce the sermon to repeating the *evangelical pericope*. The *Homiliary* is nice, sweet, and inviting, but it still cannot replace the living word. Do no fear of finding original metaphors, of using them in a picturesque speech, plainly, to everybody's understanding, of replacing the grey of so many grumpy sermons for the vivacity of the strong colors. A little fauvism, I am daring to affirm, by making a lightening incursion into the domain of the plastic arts.

**Nicolae Steinhardt**

**Beloved Father Justin,**

In an extraordinary text belonging to the French poet Henri Michaux – I have recently come across to – it is about a candidate to monasticism who confesses to the abbot of the monastery where he would want to be accepted: you know, Father, that I have no faith, no light, no essence, no trust in myself, and neither do I believe that it will be possible to help myself, let aside helping others. I have nothing.

The abbot answers:

It doesn't matter! You don't have faith, but by giving it to others, you will have it too. By searching for the faith for somebody else, you will achieve it. On this brother, on your neighbor, you must help him with that what you don't have. Not out of your abundance, not out of your fewness, but out of that what you don't have. By bestowing to another that what you don't have – faith, light, trust, hope – you will achieve those for yourself.

"You mut help out of that what you don't have".

"By giving that what you don't have, you will achieve that what you have given to another". (…)

Lo the Christian paradox in the whole its fulness, power, and splendor.

Lo what Christ requires form us: what a great impossible absolute! You to give that what you don't have! But lo also the insane promise, rousing, shaking: by bestowing that what you don't have, you too will achieve that what you have bestowed; you, who have bestowed out of the void of your being. The supra-natural gift bestowed to another will be reflected upon yourself and it will fill yourself up, in will enrich you, it will transform you, it will Christianize you.

Of course! It couldn't have been otherwise! How were I so blind and stupid to that I could imagine that He asks us to give out of what we have – much of few? big deal! But He asks from us something else, He asks us the impossible: us to give that what we don't have. Like Himself, being God, He bestowed to us His death of a mortal.

And Claudel: What are you afraid of? I am the impossible who looks at you.

Let perish from within us any fear, any uncertainty, any despair: the monk is called to give to others the faith and the light even if he lacks those. And let him not worry: by bestowing he too will achieve those.

**Into the Lord,**
**Abba Nicolae**

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## Foundation into Word[1] [2]

Nicolae Steinhardt, after he entered "Saint Ana" – Rohia Monastery and putting on the coat of renouncing and of the total self-bestowing, he came to me and asked me: Am I allowed to continue writing? I answered his question by telling him: Until now you have been writing by your own will. From now on, dear Father Nicolae, not only that you are allowed to continue writing, but even more than that, you are given the spiritual task of writing and of publishing hundredfold and thousandfold more.

And what would you want me to write about? – he asked me in continuation.

I want you to write everything God will inspire you to, I answered him. Write without fear, without restraint, do not bury the talent. You will know what and how to write. And I am sure that you will write only what the today's people by and large need, in order to scatter the darkness that we are in.

Monk Nicolae dela Rohia wrote and spoke much to the believers, who gathered together to Rohia, on Sundays and on holidays. The atmosphere of this place transfigured him, it transformed him in a true apostle, into a consummate believer, into a real philosopher not only of the word but also of the deed and of the spiritual feelings, which cannot be known but by him who had the courage to reject himself and to put on the coat that was worn yore by the great heroes of the spiritual life. After putting on the vestments of Christian Orthodox monk, everything Father Nicolae Steinhardt wrote and published (literary or theological texts) wore the imprint of the authenticity founded on the Word revealed by God. And these pages of light comprised in the present book are the blessed fruit of the obedience. Of the obedience to God, in the first place. That's why these words are bearers of light and of grace. They will overflow peace and joy in many souls whoa re trying to find themselves and to find the road towards the supreme purpose of the existence Who is God.

Each page of this book carries a message and a blessing for being written by a man having a clean heart, who found God through Jesus Christ the Lord and the Savior of all of us.

***† JUSTINIAN CHIRA***
***Bishop of Maramures and Satmar***

[1] Foreword to the second edition form the year 1992, printed by the Publishing House of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Maramures and Satmar – Baia Mare.
[2] The present book has been translated in the English language by Col.(r) Dr. Marius Golea.

**Argument**
**To the volume *Bestowing You Will Achieve***

In the year 2005, the Saint Ana – Rohia Monastery printed the first and the most important volume from the integral works belonging to N. Steinhardt: *Diary of the Happiness.* The book's release enjoyed and impressive welcoming on the book market from Romania, especially due to the fact that the new edition approached the personality of the monk-intellectual from all perspectives and in the whole its complexity.

The present book is the second volume form the cultural, philosophical, and theological inheritance from the Delarohia Monk. This second volume is also second to the first volume regarding its importance, and it is composed of essays-speeches utter from the pulpit of the Rohia Monastery, starting with the moment which N. Steinhardt became monk Delarohia, by putting on the monastic gown.

Since that moment the Rohia Monastery has been putting at his disposal the church's pulpit, and in addition to the joy of talking to the believers who have been visiting the monastery, since the beginning of the year 1980 and until the year 1989, the year of Steinhardt's leaving to the Lord, he had been uttering in front of the believers as series of speeches which, in addition to the fact that they were uttered so that to be possibly understood by the average listener, they also had approached themes and problems subtly sneaked in, which he combated, as much as he could, the abuses of the communist regime. We were witness to that and we were worried because knowing that those speeches surely were being recorded by the envoys of those who stalked Steinhardt on every of his steps, and that it was possible that those popple could set him up and prosecute him again in a justice which was a servant of the communist regime, a thing happened to other former political detainees too.

In his speech held on *The Sunday of the Multiplication of the Breads* – in the situation which all over Romanian the bread was rationalized and the poor Romanians were forced to wait for a long time in lines for getting the daily bread – he made the following adaptation of the text of the pericope from the Gospel, by using a quote from Berdiaev: "*The problem of the bread, as a great thinker thought, the problem of the for me as individual who, I don't' hide this, I am greedy and I know my tendency to complain and to be discontent, it is, yes, a*

*material problem. But the problem of my neighbor's bread, as Berdiaev said too, it is no longer a material problem, but it is a spiritual duty. Let's take heed, shivering with respect, at the changing of the tone register: when I am concerned with my covetousness, I the carping and lusting individual, my bread is a material problem. But when I am preoccupied with the bread of my neighbor, his problem becomes a duty of mine, and it jumps from the material realm to the spiritual realm.*

*Lo the best answer to be given to the false idealists. If instead of crying for myself I deplore the needy, by carping will become compassion and it will take a totally different countenance"*. (*Bestowing You Will Achieve*, p. 61). It is as clear as one can get that in this way he urged to take stance and to courage when facing the communist regime's horrors.

God saved us and it didn't happen that what was possible to happen. Besides, the monks resisted the pressures and they didn't betray monk Nicolae Steinhardt, but they cherished him and they loved him, and he felt that and he remained with the whole his being tied to the monastery until the last day of his life.

By publishing the second volume of the integral work of N. Sneinhardt, Rohia Monastery in addition to the fact of being spiritual bride to him during his life on earth, and culture sanctuary, and alter for sacrifice and pulpit of confession, it helps us in this way to walk a memorial of the cross and of the suffering, of the death into the hope for the resurrection into faith, of this great and unique witness of Christ.

Rohia Monastery
21st of November, the year 2005
The Entrance of the Mother of the Lord into Church

*†Justin Hodea Sigheteanul*
*Vicar - Hierarch*

## Foreword

The texts of the present little book – except for the *Orthodox Creed*, of the *Monastic Thoughts*, and of *Magura Camp* – are sermons. They haven't been stylized or reviewed. There fore they contain too many repetitions, recurrent themes, and stylistic obsession. Or they unveil cogitative manias, lexical and metaphorical poverty, and a narrow informational field. All the more they unveil the author (the preacher) in the whole his psychical, mental, and cultural weaknesses, the sermon becoming what they should be: a public confession and a dialogue with the listeners[3], and not a haughty, pedantic, pretentious rebuke, of a triumphalist teaching. The preacher, the believers, they together step – by feeling, by coming again, by persevering, by understanding with difficulty, by wondering – towards Christ.

Nicolae Steinhardt

[3] According to Dumitru Stăniloae in his work *The Immortal Image of God*: "The main spiritual means through which the man communicated himself to another as complementary sources of meanings, of feelings, and the means for reciprocal enrichment, it is the word which the people strengthen they common humanity through… The people water on one another by words, but out of a need built up in them by a power that is above them. And the words aren't important by the fact that they sound nicely, but by the fact that they also communicate their water as spiritual springs, which are connected to one another in a subterranean manner and with the supreme ocean. The man himself comes into the one who hears his words, and the man opens himself to him who communicated him those words. The man himself is a living water by the fact that he gives himself and he waters him whom he bestows himself by his words".

**What Do I Owe to Christ**

> *Blessed are they whose lawlessness has been forgiven and whose sins have been covered.* (Ps. 31: 1[4])
>
> *And He was commanding them not to tell that to anyone. But the more He was commanding them that, the more they were heralding Him.* (Mk. 7: 36)

There is in the Judaic ritual a prayer composed of a chain of thanks brought to God for all the benefactions destine to His people Israel. As choir, or as verse intercalated after each mentioned gift there are the words *dai lanu* (in Romanian transliteration) which mean: it is enough to us. If there was only that God got us out of the land of Egypt, it would be enough for blessing and extolling God. If there was only that God transformed the sea into dry land, it would be enough for blessing Him and for not ceasing us to thank Him. If there was only that He fed us in the desert… and so on. Each divinity's deed, each wonder would be enough for stirring up the gratitude of the people and for making them exclaim: *dai lanu*!

Likewise thinks any Jew who has crossed through the Holy Mystery of the Christian Baptism, Whom God has revealed Himself to, and Who, now, is counted among "the Jews who believed in Him", for he can shout out: it is enough what You have done for me, Christ God!

For You have removed the fish scales which covered my eyes before, I am thanking You from the whole my heart, from the whole my soul, from the whole my thought, and with the whole my virtue. If You did only that after You had taken heed at me, it would be worthy and righteous for me to shout out in tears: *dai li*!

For You have given me the possibility of knowing my own sinfulness, nothingness, and wickedness, I am bringing You praises and thanks; and if Your gift to me was only that, it will would be too abundant so that I am repeating: *dai li*!

For You have allowed me to pray to You, to love You, and to worship You – it is enough, abundantly enough for to me for I to bless Your Holy Name.

[4] In the KJB we have: Ps. 32: 1. (English language translator's note; in continuation: E. L. t.'s n.).

For You have sown within me the hope for forgiveness and I have started seeing the possibility of my salvation – be, You Lord, extolled!

For You have given me the daring for conceiving me-You relationships with You, my Lord and God, I am wondering and I don't know else but shouting out: *dai li*!

And also, for I can by now imagine myself among those whom You told: "If you remain into Myword, you will truly be My disciples. And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn. 8: 31-32).

Grateful I am to You, beyond any possibility of expressing it in our weak and banal human words, My Christ, also for achieving the quality of being Your "friend", for having been, to say so, ennobled through faith and through the water of the Holy Ghost. For I have existed the sadness, the gloomy, the mourning, the disappointment, the acedia (there was an acedia of the layman to me, of the unbeliever), and for I have come closer to the happiness state.

And also, especially for You have reckoned me able to understand and to be consummately convinced that You are the Truth, the Way, and the Life.

If I won't be saved, this absolute conviction would be totally enough to me in order I to know the peace and for I to taste the lack of worry, for You have bestowed me, Lord, due to Your generosity, so I to find out the whole truth – an atrocious one – about myself; you have released me from the slavery of the sin, which I don't think it had a more bonded servant that I was.

More than that (for You never bestow only a little, or with parsimony, or according to justice, but only plentifully, grace upon grace, you don't share tips but You invite to the imperial dinner) due to Your kindness and mercifulness I have been able to impropriate itself the saying of Dostoiyevsky: if one could indubitably prove to me, and I was on my death bed, that Christ is not the truth, that the truth is different – if that demonstration was enchantable and overwhelming – I wouldn't doubt myself even for a moment; I would choose to stay with Christ, not with the truth.

*Dai li*!

Out of a servant and of a crippled man You have made me a free man and a senior; out of fearful and wicked, a daring man; out of the being of the darkness, a man craving for light and free to try that sensation that I am not forbidden from aspiring to effectively behave myself according to Your teaching and to Your will.

This is for You haven't only unveiled myself to myself into the whole my misery and lowness, but You unveiled to myself my good and desirable valences from within me:

- You have shown me that I haven't been definitively and irremediably lost;

- You have brought me out of narrowness and darkness;

- You have translated me existentially and on my behalf the shaking (and comforting) phrase: *Qui Mariom absolvisti mihi quoque sped dedisti*;

- and You haven't asked me to annul myself, to die, but – on the contrary – You have asked me to die to the sin and to the vanities and to live int You – with love and with joy – namely into freedom, into good will, and into peace (for You cherishing the man – says Father Stăniloae – You don't want the confounding of the man with Yourself, but You want to maintain and elevate the man into an eternal dialogue of love").

You have also unveiled to me another great (and for a long time totally unknown to me) mystery, namely the ineluctable universal law of the paradox, so that You have facilitated to me to understand that the innocence cannot be obtained but on this paradoxical way of admitting the own culpability.

You have also allowed me to be shared with Your all-clean Body and with Your all-clean Blood and so I realized that any lawless deed of mine is to me only a source of bitterness and disturbance, and that the generosity acts are courage and carelessness – "the good and the beautiful deeds" of the so blasphemed practical morals – are the only ones creating peace and satisfaction.

Do you make a phone call to Christ? said André Gide ironically. One doesn't even need a call, He is always present and ready to enter the (open) door of the heart and He is capable only of those acts which are characteristic to the inward noblesse which he proposes to us too, by preaching us that those acts are always available to us: discretion, forgiveness, forgetfulness, getting out of pettiness and cheapness, banishing away from us: the keeping of the evil in mind and the urge for revenge and the hatred and the susceptibility and the irascibility and the spite and many other stupidities whose miserable state of inferiority and an acute harmfulness He unveiled to us once and for all and He keeps unveiling it to us on each time more painfully.

Finally, I have been able to convince myself that the freedom can be conquered only by killing the sin, and I have waken myself up able to decipher the formula "I do what I want": it doesn't mean that I unconditionally obey my internal organs and my tropisms, or my beastly urges and instincts as in case I was a prisoner of my egotism, of my turpitudes, of the wound of my nature, but by submitting all of these to my will, to my rationality, and to my conscience, and to my good (cleaned) part of my self, of my supra-self. I do what I want, me the faithful and humble disciple of Jesus Christ, and not that what would be

pleasant to the demon would that dwells within me or that stalks me from around me, I to do in the name of the so-called instinctual freedom, on the ground of which the devil tempts me in order to urge me to surrender myself and to be his servant and the servant of his evil ghosts.

Not being I baptized when I was a little child, but I was baptized at full matureness, I was able to experience the baptism both as Holy Mystery and as the mystery as death and resurrection, as inexhaustible source of living water and of sensational happiness. The overwhelming majority of the Christians cannot know *how it feels* the baptized one and what truly is this lightening act; but they who were in my situation they know as clearly as one can know that it isn't a form, or a ritual, or a ceremony, or a symbol: it is a discrete work of the living God[5].

I also owe to the Lord the priceless, the unexpected power of enduring and suffering, of obeying myself, patiently and following to Him, to his example given us by Him: "He participates together with us to our endurance of troubles and in this sense too He humbles Himself together with us, by burying Himself into a kenosis, into a night which He repeats it in the life of each of us" (Dumitru Stăniloae). Or, as Simone Veil said – she was a Jewish woman dewy by the grace of the faith into Christ – the Christianity doesn't offer us a miraculous means for escaping the suffering, but it makes available to us the miraculous means for enduring that suffering.

And that doesn't want at all to mean identifying the Christianity to the suffering. By suffering one can reach the truth and the self-denial, but Albert Camus shows that the detachment from the worldly things can be achieved by a worthy heart also through happiness. *Especially* through this kind of happiness we have ascend to the upper steps of the ladder. The pain, actually, it is "the less honorable face of the endeavor". The target remains the happiness, which we owe to impropriate it, beyond misfortunes or troubles or trials. The essence of the Christian teaching is this detachment, this discovery of the happiness.

So that above all I owe to Christ the liberating, inebriating, exalting, transforming, unlimited feeling of happiness – shapr like a two edges sword – and the becoming aware of the fact that "He can me a new creature out of you" isn't a simple theologian enunciation or an exemplary affirmation, but it is a constant objective, a raw reality.

[5] "As at the Lord's baptism, in the baptism of each Christian the sky opens, and it is open the field of the spiritual understanding of the existence's meanings" (Pr. Prof. dr. Constantin Galeriu, in *Sacrifice and Redemption*).

Lo why, among all the verses of the Book of Psalms, I like repeating these ones form the Psalms 65 and 72[6], as I fell them closer to me, as more speaking about the joy which I have been ceaselessly delighting myself since the day I received the euphoric gift of the Holy Baptism:

"We passed through fire and through water and You have brought us to resting".

"Come and hear all of you who fear the Lord and I will tell you how many things He has done to my soul".

"If I had injustice within my heart. may the Lord not hear me".

"Blessed is God Who hasn't rejected from me my prayer and His mercy".

"For I was reckless and I didn't know it; as a beast I was in front of You".

"You grabbed me by my right hand. With Your advice You have been advising me and with glory You have received me".

From these inspired words to the feeling of general reconcilement that engulfs me, there is only a short distance. What reconcilement? With God, with the people, and with the world, with the people who wish me evil, with the people who wronged me, by even a wholly extraordinary thing – with those whom I did wrong to, and, finally, even with myself.

[6] The translator kindly warns the reader that the numerations between the Romanian Orthodox Bible and the King James Bible differ both in the psalms' numbers and, sometimes, even in the place and division of the verses. Also, on occasions, the content of some verses differs or it is even opposite. (E. l. t.'s n.).

# I.
# *PROLEGOMENA VERBIS*
# - THE TIME OF THE FIGS –

## NICODEMUS

God speaks to Nicodemus as to an intelligent and literate man. The Lord calls him "a teacher of Israel". So, the Lord doesn't' resort to parables or to clean examples or to advises, but the Lord unexpectedly (sort of speaking) unveils to Nicodemus the final mysteries and the chief principles of the new Law. As to a theologian and as to a professional, the Lord attacks directly the practica matter in cause; themselves the procedures and the *sine quibus nan* conditions of the salvation. The tone if serious, and there are not facile explanations at all. One could say that the Lord follows the later principle invokes by Thomas More: *I trust I make myself obscure*, which can be interpreted (as appropriate as one can get for the dialogue between Jesus and His nocturnal guest): I hope for not being easily to understand, for you realize – you, the one whom I am addressing Myself to – the complication and the difficulty of the subject which we are dealing with and the trust I have in you, by presenting you not conventional thoughts in average words, but the worries of my most intimate and unclear thought. Likewise, the Savior doesn't want to spare the Pharisees by telling him intelligible words, or to delude him by sharing him simple truths, but He wants to conquer the Pharisees in no time. He won't give signs to the Pharisee. And He applied the rule: from him who has much, it will be asked for much in return. The Lord doesn't shy of bewildering him and, anyway, the Lord doesn't waste His time with introductions or preparations. The lord pushes into deep water one who doesn't know how to swim. Seemingly more than ever Christ shrouds Himself in darkness and in mystery, around Him there are only clouds, dark water, and embers, like in the Psalm no. 17 of prince David. Thet things given to Nicodemus to hear are so impenetrable and shaking.

And the poor man, literate and doctor as he was, he understood too little. And he reacts like a nescient individual and he asks questions worthy of a naïve, illiterate, and unmalicious young man, one among those who are poor inspirit and who sanctify the place where they dwell but who don't have any access to the spiritual life. This is because to the willing obscurity of the lord, to the shock method – of *Zen satori* – used by the Lord, the bewildered scholar opposes objections of an infantile elementary level, and he proves to be totally obtuse. *I trust I make myself obscure*: verily the Lord succeeded in dressing Himself up in darkness and mysteries, and Nicodemus is truly dizzy and lost.

From where there turn out certain conclusions:

a) the extremely unexpected, paradoxical and surprising character of the Christian teaching;

b) the immense difficulty for the common rationality and for the erudite knowledge in assimilating the snares of this teaching.

To be fair, the total wonder and non-understanding manifested by the Pharisees scholar, of the infantilism of his reaction aren't something to wonder about (how comes? To be the man born for the second time and to enter again the womb od his mother?). This infantilism doesn't compromise Nicodemus but, on the contrary, it proves something totally different regarding him: how surprising, unexpected, and paradoxical the Christianity is! (And how fallacious, consequently to the discovery of the manuscripts from Qumran, the striving of the University of Jerusalem and of the international rabbinate for transforming the Christendom in some sect of Essenes sort). The Baptism and the Impartation are two totally extraordinary solution and almost unconceivable by the normal, even unaware, non-hostile and non-corrupted human mind. All the more they would have appeared so to a normal mind at that time: one could expect any new ethical system; but the fact that the salvation's solution consists of the spreading with water and of consuming the flesh and the blood of a fellow human shows itself to be beyond the reasoning capacity of the thinking creature and above the thinking creature's possibility of detaching from aprioristic ideas. O moral doctrine, regardless how severe or refined, it wouldn't have stupefied, neither it would have cause the removal. But the second birth out of water and ghost! Being so, to Nicodemus – overwhelmed, irritated, upset of course with himself, caught like in an ambush – it had remained to him only the refuge into the extreme simplicity of the judgment power, in perplexity, in a strictly literary semiotics, in clinging onto the signifier, in categorically refusing to pass to the fearsome (by profoundness and implications) meaning. The Lord, understanding Nicodemus, He didn't show Himself surprised by Nicodemus's answer; He doesn't bother to give Nicodemus other clarifications, He kept it on the line of a merciless satori, entrusting Himself to the good will, to the good faith, to the good intentions of His interlocutor who, unmistakingly, he will finally understand it.

And that happened. Nicodemus will intervene in favor of Christ in front of the hierarch and of the Pharisees (Jn. 7: 51: "Doe out law judge a man without before listening to him and without knowing what that man has done?"). Nicodemus will be, together with Josephus from Arimateea, among the people who took care of the decent burial of the Lord, and he brought one hundred liters of a mix of myrrh and aloe.

The Nicodemus episode is, probably, the bet proof of the impossibility of the culture and of the intelligence alone to be the way to Christ. The culture, the intelligence, or the science aren't impediments, but neither they are helping elements. And the discusses case proves only this much: that the mind and the teaching can not to impede the faith. (Once the man has reached the faith, the knowledge and the sharpness of his mind will be useful to him, they will amplify, deepen, and shaper the faith).

The Nicodemus moment is also – in the frame of the Gospels' references – also the only example of a Pharisee enlightened by faith. Nicodemus would have been also a reason for comforting and trust for the Lord. One of His people who searched for Him, who recognizes Him, who bestows himself to Him! Nicodemus is prudent (he comes at night, he intervenes procedurally), he is a bigoted Jew, he is a Pharisee, but he isn't blind; he realizes that only One coming from God can do what Jesus the Nazarene is doing. That's why Nicodemus goes to see Him. Later on, he will be less prudent: he will intervene in favor of the defendant, accusing the upset of his colleagues (Jn. 7: 52: "Are you too from Galilee?", and he will take care of the inanimate body of the Crucified (Jn. 19: 39), without any doubt stirring up the anger of the same colleagues of his.

We don't know whether or not Nicodemus was a disciple of Christ. But we still know that through him was shown something else: that, namely, to Christ came not only the publicans, the whores, the sinners, but also the scholars. The Nicodemus case proves that *all* the people are called and all of them are welcomed. Each one according to the measure and to the kind of his gift, of his preparation, of his mind: Nicodemus, therefore, only with harshness and with exigence, as a scholar he is. Not only the publicans, the whores, the sinners – but also the righteous! Nicodemus is presented to us, as such, as the opposite to the good brother from the parable of the profligate son. Unlike that one, he – righteous, scholar, clean – enter the feast, he doesn't shy to join the whores and the sinners; there's no conceitedness at him, at all. Nicodemus offers us the picture – charming, appeasing, splendid – of the modest scholar, of the unsure and discontent with himself Pharisee. Lo him there, sitting in the front of the Lord, a poor nocturnal visitor, somehow bewildered by the things he is hearing, doubtlessly scared both by the things told him and by the perspective of being caught by the zealous Pharisees in the house of the deceiver, striving to understand, probably cursing himself because of his stupid questions, whose stupidity he possible didn't even realize. Lo him full of benevolence, curiosity and incertitude, full of the strong desire for understanding and for believing, full of admiration and sympathy and

veneration for The One Who is in front of him and Whose words he is thirstily listening to, and seemingly both with fear and dominated by an insane hope. With the insane hope which Fr. Mauriac reckons about that it is due to be instilled to us by the behavior on the cross of the good thief: lo Nicodemus, as a thief in the eyes of his colleagues into Pharisaism, seemingly himself uttering too: Remember me, Lord, into Your kingdom, remember me the clumsy into mysteries scholar, the nescient into the true realities doctor. And not only in the light of this poor candle from this poor table, but also in the light of the day of Your fearsome judgment, remember me together with all of those who, during Your earthly life, they had filled Your soul up with comfort and gentleness: Your All-Clean Mother, Your beloved disciple, Your Forerunner, Veronica, the good thief, the fiery Peter, and all the other like these. Do not forgive either me, or Luke, or the few others who prove to the people that the way to heavens is open to the scholars too.

Nicodemus – insane hope of the intellectuals of an end of a century overwhelmed by printings, by information, by servo-mechanisms, and starving for faith - distributing in the world of the signifiers and of the signified the trace of the doings of the All-Keeper and of the promises of Christ.

## THE MONASTIC VOCATION

*By seeing the strange embodiment of God,*
*let us estrange ourselves from the vain world.*

(Akathists of our Lord Jesus Christ)

In order us to try to understand and to clarify the monastic vocation we necessarily need to undertake a short incursion in three domains of the science: the mathematical logics (algebra), the geometry, and the physics.

We remember from algebra that if there is A, there will necessarily be a non-A too. (In the cybernetic digital terminology: 1, 0). Any value can bear the plus or the minus sign. Five, for instance, it implied minus five too etc.

The world, until no such a long time ago, it believed the geometry formulated some two thousand and three hundred years ago, by Euclid, one supposed to be equally immutable as the Newtonian physics of the cosmography of Ptolemeus, but which suffered revolutionary transformations nevertheless. Mathematicians as Riemann, Bolyai, Lobachevsky, they demonstrated that can be imagine a geometry which to contradict Euclid, where the parallel lines meet one another or the sum of the angles in a triangle to be superior to 180 degrees. There is, therefore, beside the classical Euclidian geometry, a surprising (if not bewildering) and still a totally rational non-Euclidean geometry.

Why have we needed to remind these summary scientifical notions?

For the simple reason that they make available to us the most exact definition fo the monasticism, which is: the world of non-A, the world of the non-Euclidian geometry and of the anti-matter. Shortly speaking, the monasticism is the world opposite to the usual world, it is the contrary and contradictory world – is I may say so – of John the Wrongheaded.

What the people want, what they pursue?

a) To take, to gather, to earn, to receive things, objects, good, money. All sorts of goods, important or insignificant, as may as possible; and money, which are the means which the individual accesses the goods through;

b) To make friends with as many people as possible, earning friends, relations, and acquaintances. These ones aren't less useful than the money, they too can bring benefits and wealth and, in any case, they satisfy the very strong and general need for verbosity. The friend, as the English people say, lo

the most important capital. And, it doesn't the verb *to chat* express one of the greatest pleasures of the Euclidian man?

But the monks? They want the contrary of the things mentioned above.

The monks want not to earn but to bestow, to distribute even the little they have, to deprive themselves of things, of good, or money. Instead of loading their wardrobe with clothes and they dwelling place with furniture, they restrict their clothes and their furniture to the strictly necessary. Their purpose is the narrowness, the fewness, the poverty, going all the way to practicing the beggary. Some Catholic monastic orders – as for instance the Franciscans and the Carmelites (at least in their initial phase) – they imposed to their adherents to live only out of beggary. Still today, in India and in the Extreme Orient numerous Buddhist monks (or also old laymen who withdraw themselves from the world by leaving their dwelling place) live a wanderer's life: they bear a bowl and they only eat that what (and all) is put by people as alms in that bowl.

As the poverty (or the extreme modesty and the total frugalness), the monks, unlike their fellow humans from the world, they search for isolation and silence. Abba Arsenius heard a voice commanding him: run away, be silent, appease yourself. And Friar Bruno, the founder of the order of the Carthusians, he is represented having his pointer finger of his right hand placed over his lips, as symbol of the silence. Then, the monks not only they shun the verbosity and the much-speaking, but they also reckon them as incompatible to their life-style, as also they reckon so any complaining and whining. The Paterikon gives us the example of the two monks which hear a man moaning and crying. Who is that laymen moaning? – one monk asks another monk. It is not a layman, Father, answers another monk, he is a brother of ours who is ill. The first one asks again: Does a monk moan and cry? Run away from here, Father, that one is doubtlessly a layman.

An example of non-Euclidian and all-monastic behavior is given to us by the Saint and Pious Mother Paraschiva: when she was young, she bestowed her warm and adorned coat to a poor. (in the world of A, the child would have asked her parents, who were rich, to buy her a as nicer and possible a coat). Or, the Arnauld sisters, of a pious and wealthy French family form the XVII Century, very young, they run from home to a monastery. Their parents come to rebuke them, to beg them, to ask them to return to their family. The little girls didn't listen to their parents and they didn't even allow their parents to step inside the monastery. (This scene is widely commented by Saint-Beuve in his *Port-Royal*). Or the Anuv and Pimen brothers, at whose hermitage is their mother beating, shouting out, crying, and begging them to receive her: "I want to see you, my sons, for what is wrong in that? Am I not your mother? And I

am totally grey-haired". What are we doing with this crone? they ask. Then Abba Poemen comes to the gate and tell her: "What do you want, crone? Why are you shouting out like that? Do you want to see us here or in the world from beyond?". And the crone, understanding, left in peace. Or Abba Arsenius who was asked by Archbishop Theophilus and by one of his companions to tell them a useful word, and he asked them: "If I tell you a word, will you keep it? They promised to keep it, so that Arsenius told them: Wherever you hear that Arsenius is, you won't go near".

Instead of amassing things, the monk likes to give them away, for he knows (Acts 20: 35) that it is happier to give than to take. Instead of speaking, to be silent (Ps. 37: 13-14: "And I like a deaf I wasn't hearing and like a mute who doesn't open his mouth. And made myself like a man who doesn't hear and who doesn't have reproaches in his mouth"). Instead of complaining, to suffer. Instead of amassing wealth, to scatter. He prefers the poverty instead of richness. To relations, the isolation. To success, the obscurity. To agitation, the peace. The stuffing himself up with food, the fasting. To debauchery, the chastity. To desire for power boiling within any man's souls (so constantly underscored by Nietzsche and Adler), the obedience and the submission. To protesting and violence, the resignation. To raising the self, the humbleness. To pleasures, the restraint. To obtaining the victory in a law suit, the enduring the injustice and the loss (1 Cor. 6: 7).

The founder of the Christianity, Himself Jesus, why did Him come into the world? To be served, as it had been natural? No, but He to serve! (Mt. 20: 28). To be sacrifices brought to Him? No, but to sacrifice Himself. To reign? No, but to die a shameful and cursed death on the Cross.

Yes, we are in full world of Dostoyevsky, there where, often, two plus two equal five. In the world of the paradox which is not other than the Christianity's essence, a faith according to which, for instance, the bet was to innocence of that man is that of admitting his guilt. In the world of the total existing form the mechanics, form the logics, form the geometry and from the physics of the sublunar systems. In *Tradition and Freedom in the Orthodox Spirituality*, His Eminence Antonie, the Metropolitan of Transylvania, he characterizes the monastic vocation as "some sort of anticipation of the eternal life during the present age". More than that, "the constant and express confirmation of the eschatological perspective of the existence". By using a living and striking image, we are told that: "there is not science without having a few geniuses who integrally consecrate themselves to the science. There is no music without a few genius composers integrally consecrating themselves to

that music field… The Monk is the type of the Christian who integrally consecrate himself", he is the absolute Christian.

But it would be a mistake if one thought than the monk doesn't pursue the happiness. This one, exactly as the laymen do, the monks too want it; only the ways and the methods differ, that's all. So, let not the laymen imagine that the monks would be totally exceptional beings and let them not admire the monks exaggeratedly. This purpose is common to both categories: and who can say and claim that only his way is sure and good? The *Paterikon* teaches us that a simple cobbler, a nice guy, was not reckoned as inferior to a great hermit. Speaking the truth, and thinking not in a hurry, we see that the monks' merit is not so exceptional and people usually think it would be, because there is no doubt that the monk's way is easier and their gate is wider. Isn't it easier to give than to receive? Oh, it is much easier! Isn't it easier to live isolated than striving to gain friends and relationships and to achieve their affection and their devotion? Forgiving than plotting complicated avenge plans, as Monte-Cristo did? It is easier, of course, it is losing than gaining (the probabilistic calculation proves it categorically) and getting poor than enriching yourself. It is easier to observe the monotony of a schedule than searching, on a daily basis, for other fun, distraction, and preoccupation. Living in peace and carelessness that craving for ranks and titles.

The old ritual of admitting the candidate into the monastic community proves, despite all these, that there is between the two modes of living a difference – and not a small one. This waiting for days at the monastery's gate (without being paid attention), the harsh words, the mockery, the banishment, followed in the end by the acceptation into the monastery, and then followed by hard and humiliating works in the absence of any comforting or at least non-rebuking words, or being send after a year back into the world being told to come back only after the passing of the prescribed time, for the long years of apprenticeship (for them who turned back after the twelve months spent in the world), all of those could eventually end with being tonsured into monasticism. But how difficult that was! Why meant being tonsured into monasticism after so many relentless tests? Nothing else but the crossing of the candidate from the state of matter to the state of anti-matter.

And we can ask ourselves: don't the savants - in the laboratories and in the scientific institutes of the world – try to obtain antimatter? Of course they did, but they have ascertained that only for achieving the plasma, namely the fourth state of the matter (in addition to the solid, liquid, and gaseous states) it would be necessary to achieve a three hundred million degrees temperature.

For now, they have been able to obtain only a hundred million degrees and only for a millionth part of a second.

But the monk, by leaving the Euclidian condition of layman and by achieving access to the monastic antimatter state, what feat does he do? He creates and maintains in his soul and in his mind and in his heart – and not only for a fraction of a second but for his entire life – a temperature of three hundred million degrees! This is, maybe, the very definition, current and rigorous, of the monastic vocation: the possibility for the one in cause to maintain – as a real character of a scientific-fantastic literature – within himself, under his humble vestment and behind his destitute countenance – a non-A state, non-Euclidian, of antimatter, unsuspected form outside and – within – ceaseless temperature of three hundred million degrees.

The vote of the poverty, of the virginity, and of the obedience? Of course, sure. But, also of the unquenching of the Ghost Who we all well know about that He is a burning fire. After the Christian is born out of water and Ghost (Jn. 3: 4), the birth of the monk is out of Holy Ghost and fire!

Monk is called he who after receiving the gift utters these words of the psalmist (38: 4): “My heart got hot within me and into my thought there will be ignited a fire”. And what does Christ say? “Fire I have come to throw on earth and how much I would want it now to be lit” (Lk. 12: 49).

## THE WEDDING FROM CANA OF GALILEE

The Holy Scripture doesn't mention the name of the man whose wedding Lord Christ was among the guests (we believe, by and large, that it could have been Nathanael, "the Israelite whom there is not cunningness in"), and that wedding constituted the occasion of His first miracle and it comprises significations of a nature that enlightens somehow differently the common perspective on the Christian teaching or, better said, the Christian conception on life (Jn. 2: 1-11).

At Cana of Galilee, Christ unveils Himself as a Lord of the abundance, of the gladness, and of the fulness, and the Christianity as being totally different from some sort of gloomy and dark puritanism, amateur and glorifier of destitution, poverty, fewness, intransigence, and sourness, quenched hearths and harsh faces. But no! The Lord blesses the multiplication of the fruits, the abundance of the wine, the gladness of His creatures! He only frowns Himself while speaking to the Pharisees, he gets anger only when He sees those who transform the prayers house of the Father in cave of thieves, or when He hears the judgment of those who neither save themselves nor allow other to be saved. It would be easy and logical to imagine Him answering His Mother's ask during the wedding from Cana of Galilee: What is to you woman to take care of the drink of these people? It is enough that we have come here. Do you want them to get drunk?

But the All-Maker Lord didn't' say that. After out of the commandment of His Mother all the vessels had been filled up with water, He transformed the water into wine. But in what kind of wine? A wine so good that it dazed both the bridegroom and of course all wedding's guests. The Lord of the feats worked, the Lord of the abundance willed. And He does everything so, always, without mistake.

Everything in the parables, in the teachings, and in the urges of Christ, it is towards richness, rich harvest, blessing, abundance, fructification, all-full, grace upon grace, reward "shaken and stuffed and topped", and to him who has it will be given more, to them who bring ten talents will be given five times ten cities, the master girdles himself and serves the good servant, and him who behaved well it will be given not crumbles, not tip, but invitation to the imperial dinner!

No, of course, an assertive not, the Lord doesn't love and doesn't preach the desert, the tundra, the thorns, the brambles, the pelamid, the snake, the

stone, the shrew, the draught. But He preaches the grapes, the figs, the bread, the egg, the fish, the honey, the old and good wine.

The feasts, the references to food and drink, to dinner and wedding, are so frequent in the *Gospels* that, without fearing of being us accused of blasphemy, we are justified in saying that in their content there isn't lost any occasion for throwing a feast and that the ancient saying "set the table, do the table" – an in its prophane meaning – as not at all inappropriate for characterizing the worldly-communitarian face of the Lord's behavior and of His disciples' behavior in their relationships with their fellow humans and with their need for humanity and for human warmth.

The typical example is given to us by the wonderous fishing. Luke (5: 6) tells us about "a multitude of fish, so that their fishing nets were breaking", and John (21: 6) mentions that "they cast the fishing net and they were no longer able to drag it out because of the multitude of the fish". Itself the Kingdom of Heavens, what is it? In order to illustrate the Heavenly Kingdom, the Lord (Lk. 14: 16) what else tells us than resembling it to a big dinner? It is about dinner also in the parable of the profligate son and in recounting the things which happened in Betany. Onde Martha (Lk. 10: 40) strives "with much care" it means she was preparing a big feast[7]. The Lord proved to always be careful with the food: also, in order to define the Kingdom of Heavens he mentions the flour and the dough: he defends the people who have eaten, because of being hungry, the breads offerings which were destined to be eaten only by the altar's servants; He also defended His disciples who, because of being hungry, they plucked wheat ears and ate wheat grains on a Sabbath day; He order to be given food to the daughter of Iair; He is preoccupied with the thousands of people who acme to listen to Him into wilderness: they should eat, so that they not to faint on their way home! The *Gospels´* texts speak about the Lord's mercy and out of all of them comes an indubitable, emotional, and parental solicitude of His for feeding all the people, whom He fully fed, so that at the end there were in excess full baskets of leftovers. At Emaus He sits to the table with two of His disciples, and there He unveils Himself as being their Teacher, there in that modest inn and at that table, where the hearts get open and the nature are exposed. After Resurrection, in order to prove that He is not a fantom, what did He do? He ate! Identically also after the wondrous fishing. He spoke to the Cananean woman about table, about bread, about crumbles. He rebuked the Apostles and He warns them by referring to bread and dough. In order His words to be understood by as many people as possible, He calls as

[7] Some translations say just that: "She was preparing to throw a big feast".

blessed those servants who, when the Master comes, He finds them taking vigil: “Verily I say to you that he will girdle himself and he will set the *table* for them and, by coming close to them, he will serve them”. And in the case of Zaccheus (Lk. 19: 6 and the followings), the Lord enter the house of the publican in order to dwell there, and that, of course, implied sitting to the table. The Lord enters anybody’s house (good or bad, believer or sinner) to eat, He accepts any invitation to dinner, He doesn’t’ refuse the Pharisees, and He even honors the leper Simon with His presence. At Apocalypse (3: 20) the text is as clear as one can get: how will the Lord answer him who hears His voice and who opens the door to Him? “I will enter at him and I will dine with him and he with Me”. (Why is here this repetition, why is it I with him and he will Me? In order to remove any condescendence, in order to establish some sort of paradoxical and much noble equality and brotherhood).

The joy is, doubtlessly, the fundamental theme of the Christianity, as also is the good annunciation: “Enter into the joy of your Master” is said in the parable of the talents. “The disciples were being filled up with joy and with Holy Ghost”, it is written in the *Acts of the Apostles* 14: 52. At Philippians 4: 4: “Always rejoice into the Lord. And I am telling you again: Rejoice!”. At 2 Corinthians 13: 11: “So, brothers, rejoice yourself”. At 1 Thessalonians 5: 16: “Rejoice, always”. At 1 Peter 4: 15: “Rejoice with a great joy”. And the Apostles, by following the example of their Teacher, they too celebrate any healing, wonder, or conversion, if not with a “feast”, then at least with a dinner. Example in the Acts of the Apostles 16: 34: “And by bringing them into the house (after the warden and his family were converted) he set the table and all he rejoiced with the whole his household”. The things done by Apostles are in accordance with the things recounted in the *Gospels*’ texts. The Lord says (Jn. 10: 10): I have come for (my sheep) to have life and to have it plentifully”. Of course, that “plentifully” refers to the previous substantive “life”: still, it is not less correct to interpret the text as meaning also: to have a plentiful life! And this is according to another pericope that is perfectly clear: where it is also about feasts, dinners, and about abundance by and large. Thus, Matthew 8: 15: “And He touched her hand (of Peter’s mother-in-law) and her fever left her and she stood up and she was *serving* Him” (see also Mk. 1: 31; Lk. 4: 34). Or, how it is characterized the Son of Man by Himself? “Lo a man eating and drinking wine” (Mt. 11: 19; Lk. 7: 34). It is here an ironical intention, a rebuke for them who are callous in their disbelieve and indifference, but the fact stays. As also the acceptation of the invitations can mean – on human plan – also the poverty of the Son of Man Who, once He didn’t have where to lean His head on, He very probably suffered, as His disciples too, of poverty. Or, in case of Levi-

Matthew's calling: "While He was sitting *at the table* in the house, lo that many publicans and sinners came and sit at the table together with Jesus and with His disciples" (Mt. 9: 10; Mk. 2: 15; Lk. 5: 29). Luke specifies (5: 30): the Pharisees and the scribes ask: Why do you *eat and drink*? In the parable of the profligate son, it is mentioned about the slaughter of the fattened calf, about "songs and dances", and it is being again conveyed to us the image of a feast or a great gladness with a very simple human countenance.

But this impression of sanctification of the simple joys, of elevating some (of course) simple metaphors and analogies to the rank of deep-meaning significations, of will of the Lord not to be His teaching confounded to who knows what grumpy, false, venomous, and Pharisaic "venomous philosophy" of the life, in order His teaching not to become a burden, and darkness, and gloom, it can be seen the most clearly in itself the supreme Mystery of the Christianity. Where did Christ establish it? At a dinner. What does it consist of? It consists of eating (bread) and drinking (wine)! And what is its purpose? To give Himself to be eaten and drunk, in order the believer to be granted the right of entering the imperial wedding, the heavenly dinner, where the chosen ones will be imparted plentifully, gift upon gift, with the meals and with the drinks of the all-beautiful Jerusalem.

He couldn't thing differently for He came not for judging and for destroying the world but for saving it; for telling us the good news; for announcing us that the day of His resurrection is that which we owe to gladden ourselves on and to rejoice ourselves on[8]. Who, above anything, He calls us to rejoice and to be happy. Hating the debauchery, the sin, but not condemning the honored joy, the blessed abundance, the holy love for life whose other name if Christ: *I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me, even if he dies, he will live* (Jn. 11: 25). And do we still dare to contest the spirit of the wedding from Cana? Claiming that we don't understand it? Reckoning as

[8] Therefore, the Apostle too placed, without denying at all their utility, under the sign of the relativity: the restraints from foods and, indirectly, all sorts of asceses: "Do not take, do not taste, do not touch! All the things destined to perish by being used – according to some human rules and teachings? Some like these have some countenance of wisdom in their apparent piousness, in humbleness, and in not sparing the body, but they have no value and they are only for the satiation of the body" (Col. 2: 21-23).
This paragraph differing from others (*some* countenance, their *apparent* piousness, they *have no value*, *only* for the satiation of the body, and in another translation: they still are towards flattering the earthly man), it is by and large less often quoted, and in it Saint Apostle Paul reduces not only the provisions of the Old Law, but also the asceses of those who are under the Grace, to the level of simple exercises of self-control, of course laudable, but not soteriological. In the regime of the Christian freedom, the joy and the love overwhelm the harshness and the contingency because of becoming autonomous purposes and because of losing their essence. In this sense, I think, must be understood also the words of Bishop Melethius of Antioch towards that Saint Simion who chained his foot to a wall: Not with chains the believer ties himself to Christ but with love and with grace. And likewise spoke the Bless Ecaterina of Sienna: not the spikes kept Christ nailed on the Cross, but His love of people.

random, as exceptional, as related only to the occasion of a festivity? As non-lighting, non-clarifying, non-embodying the whole later teaching? Since the beginning, since the first manifestation of His Godhead Christ reveals Himself to us as a Lord sanctifier of the abundance, of the gladness, and of the gift!

## THE TIME OF THE FIGS

The Lord, therefore, he was climbing from Betany towards the City of Jerusalem. In the eve, according to the *Gospel according to Mattew*, he chased off the temple those who were selling and buying, He toppled over the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of those who were trading pigeons (Mt. 21: 12-13). According to the text attributed to Mark the Evangelist, the scene of the banishment from the temple took place ulteriorly to the episode with the fruitless fig tree (Mk. 11: 15-17). Anyway, we find Christ on moments of big tension and effervescence, on the second day after his triumphant entrance to Jerusalem, or on the eve of the temple's cleaning of "thieves", close to the tragical ending of His mission on earth. This state of spirit – strained and unhesitant – seems to have been described by Prophet Isaiah: "He put of His righteousness like a breastplate and he put on His head the helmet of the deliverance; He has put the revenge on like a coat and He wrapped Himself in His zeal like in a cloak: and "I was looking around: there was no help! I was getting engulfed by wonder: there was no support! Then, My arm helped Me and My wrath was My support" (Isa. 59: 17, and 63: 5).

So, he was walking ahead from Betany and he got hungry on the way to Jerusalem. And He sees, while He was still far, a fig tree without leaves. He goes there hoping that he will find some fruits. But He is disappointed (if not the proving of an apprehension, for it was impossible Him not to know that "it wasn't the season of the figs"). The fig tree, truly so, it isn't welcoming Him (if we can use such a cordial verb) but with leaves; there are not fruits and there couldn't be any fruits at that time. Upset, as never before, the Lord curses that fig tree: to never produce fruit again and to never be useful to anyone[9]! And that happened, the fig tree quickly withering from its root up.

What can appear more unjust, more merciless, more shouting out at the sky? Persecuting and withering a poor tree that was totally innocent! Innocent, of course, given that the text itself admits that" there wasn't the season of the figs". If it wasn't the time for fructification, why was the fig tree condemned? is the simple and clean thought reasoning of the man who has common sense, be

[9] Attention: not being able to help your neighbor is a misfortune, it is a dreadful curse, it is a disaster!

it his believer or unbeliever. Both believer and unbeliever are being united here by the common resistance of the normal individual against an act of obvious inequity; and who would dare to contradict them? The case seems to be so sober and limpid: it is an injustice, it is a bursting of the anger, we cannot deny that or camouflage that.

But it is happening with the parable of the fig tree what takes place in other domains as well, in numerous cases: the deeds are judged on the basis of some just premises, but those premises don't discern different situations, and therefore those premises are false. The so-called paradox of the liar Cretan and other examples of apparently absurd logics couldn't have been solved until the logicians realized that there are complex truths or "absurdities", which cannot find their explanation until resorting to the theory of the *levels*. This theory ascertains that the same formulation can be exact on a certain level of thinking (and of perceiving the reality) and it is inexact on a different level, the confusion being triggered only when, by reckless and stubborn simplification, we refuse to notice that the so-called absurd paradox of the Cretan implies different solutions of diverse cognitive and perception plans, to successive stages of generalization.

It is the same regarding the infinite's mathematics. There the things are totally different from those in the arithmetic of the finite numbers, and everything is only bewilderment and paradox: the part is equal to the whole, and the adding or the subtraction don't modify the total. In that hotel having and infinite number of chambers – called as Hilbert's hotel – there won't be a problem to accommodate new travelers even if all the rooms are taken. The receptionist has only to more the passenger form the room no. 1 into the room no. 2, and so on, and in this way the receptionist will be able to create an unlimited number of freshly available rooms.

The pericope of the fig tree we due to submit it to an analogue treatment, by understanding that it must not be interpreted according to the rule of the natural justice and according to the values of the elementary axiology, but we must interpret in on the level of the allegorical spiritual sentences. Yeas, it is unfair to require the fig tree (or any other fructiferous tree) to produce fruits when outside season, but that injustice will vanish if we understand that is about being or not being useful to God, to answer His calling on us. It is not about fig tree and figs in this parable, but it is about man (likewise in many other Neo-Testamentary metaphors; not the birds and the oxen were the preoccupations of the Almighty!); and the man doesn't have a valid excuse for refusing the Maker or for telling Him: I have not time right now, or it is not the right moment now. Terms, dates, conditions, clauses, bargaining, are all

stricken by absolute nullity. To the calling form above one can answer with "lo me" or with "yes, Lord". The motivations, despite being humanly plausible, they won't be taken into consideration. We are not allowed to dodge even by invoking that we need to burry our father, or that we need to set in order the things in our household, or for going to see the field we have just bought, or for trying the oxen recently bought by us, or for leaving the woman whom we have just marries to.

Always and on any moment, it is the time – *and now it is* – to answer "lo me" to Christ. On this level, on this plan one cannot judge according to the things form on the prophane realm of the juridical logics. There, the terms, the intervals, the époques, the traditions are perfectly valid. The fruit of the fig tree – products of the nature, of the natural nature – are subordinated to the fructification cycles, but the devotion of the people doesn't know about terms and pauses. The allegorical interpretation is required: the fig tree is the man, and the fruitless fig tree is the man who is fruitless, cold, harsh, unreceptive to the heavenly callings. The reactions of the "robust common sense" have nothing to do with the reading of the spatial-temporal formulas' reading (they are confused); and, likewise, neither the explanation of the spiritual ciphering. Lo why, we can affirm that the man (the fig tree, in the codified language) must be always ready, always available for Christ. Nowhere the theory of the integral availability by André Gide is applied more appropriately and more consummately than to the relationships between the creature and its Builder. And being available means being always girdled, having your staff in your hand, having your footwear on your feet, prepared for travel, for action, for answering affirmatively, for *fructification*.

*There is always time for good manners,* this saying of wide circulation in the South of the United States can be an example and a ground to us: we owe to always behave appropriately, in order us to prove our good habit[10]. As in the text from Mattew 5: 25: ("reconcile with your accuser quickly as long as you are with him on the way…"), the accuser – according to the interpretation done by Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa (see Ioanichie Blana, *Spiritual Dialogues*, 1984, p. 111) – isn't but our conscience asking us to reconcile with God as long as we still are on the way of this life or, as out of the very words of our Savior (Mt. 13: 18 and the followings; Mk. 4: 3 and the followings; Lk. 8: 5 and the followings) it turns out that the places where the seeds of the sower fall represent the hearts of the listeners of the godlike Word. Likewise, the fig tree

[10] According to Camil Petrescu: Condemned to death and on my way to the execution place, I wouldn't tell to my friend who stopped me on the road: I don't have time right know to have a chat with you.

from Matthew 11: 15-17 isn't but the symbol of the man by and large, and the figs are the man's good deeds, the submission of his will to God, his tendency (and duty) to come to the help of his neighbor, and not to spare his innate desire: for answering in any case, quickly and zealously, to any appeal of the divinity or to the fellow human who is in trouble. This fellow human is personified by Christ in the episode of the fig tree, for He shows a strictly human need: the hunger. (Similarly, He is also the wounded traveler from the parable with the merciful Samaritan, and the priest and the Levite are fig trees which are fruitless of mercy, of taking heed as another's suffering, and of care: neither for them there was the time for doing the good").

We cannot harvest excuses not even from the most natural and legitimate circumstances; the oxen, the fields, the wife, and even the burial of our parent, they won't be – when the trumped of the mobilization sounds (the voice of God namely, or the shouting out for help of our fellow human) – but legalist tricks and procedural pretexts. That's why invoking those appears to invoke an incongruent aspect of not and – except the desire for burying the father – they are totally risible. Any preoccupation, any worry, and joy, any exigency, they fade and perish in the presence of the divine voice. Any disobedience is guilt; any unfulfillment of the commandment or of the request are worthy of the same qualification, regardless being they accompanied by the most solid arguments. Why is that? Because of being a confession of total impossibility of committing a normal hierarchization among obligations. If it is about following to Christ or serving Him, nothing will be a valid reason for being absent. The richness (the parable of the rich young man: Mt. 16: 16 and the followings), the fields, the beasts, the wedding, and even the filial piety are being erased when the Lord shows[11].

The fig tree vainly defends itself by invoking the typicon of the seasons, the fatal terms, the usual schedule. All of those – as it speaks a quite vulgarized and corrupted popular expression because of having been indiscriminately uses – *they don't hold*. Anytime, anywhere, in any circumstances, the man is kept (and this time the verb regains its noble hypostasis) to walk, to run, *to jump* to the support of his fellow humans or to serve his Maker. I have mentioned *supra* the trumped of the mobilization. One cannot find any more matching comparison: the calling from Jesus mobilizes irresistibly, there can be no delay, any motivation for delay is unconceivable;

[11] And the impossibility gets nuanced; the mans isn't required the physical impossible, as for instance one weighing 70 kilograms to elevate 200 kilograms; the man is required the possible impossible, namely the moral impossible (to love his enemies, to reject on himself, to sacrifice his only son), in accordance to the mode which Paul Claudel define the Divinity in: "Why are you afraid? I am the Impossible Who is looking at you".

neither Moses who invokes his stutter, nor the young man who pretexts his richness, neither that man whose field needed to be harvested were excused; they are required to listen (in both meanings). The poor excuse of the fig tree: it isn't my time yet! There always is the time for serving and for doing the good[12]. And who to him who doesn't do as the brothers Simon and Andrew did (Mt. 4: 20: "And they, *immediately* leaving their fishing nets, they went after Him'), the sons of Zebedee (Mt. 4: 22: "And they *immediately* leaving their ship and their father, they went after Him), or Levi – Matthew (Mt. 9: 9: "And leaving Jesus from there he saw a man sitting at the custom office, called Matthew, and He told him: Come after Me. And *getting up* he went after Him"). Quickly, immediately, unhesitatingly, leaving all the things, not looking back, not asking even for a little delay, regardless how justified, how natural[13]. The Lord's voice – thunder, trumpet, instantaneously.

The unfortunate fig tree is no other than the nescient, the procedure follower, the legalist, the self-standing, the callous, the formalist Pharisee who takes heed to terms and to the strictness of the provisions, and who is enough to himself and who doesn't have mercy or Holy Ghost, and who yore justified himself by boasting that he gave tenth out of cumin, of meant, and of dill!

But what could the fig tree practically do? It could enter because of shame into the ground; it could move itself, because of sorrow and of emotion, into the sea; or, much better than that, to have been to the Lord – by inward benevolence, endeavor, and tremble – occasion for a positive wonder. There is a little Japanese legend whose citation here isn't inappropriate: a philosopher strolls through the forest, he stops in front of a little tree, and he addresses himself to a branch, uttering: talk to me about God. Then, that branch buds and flourishes itself up. If the fig tree was unable to bring forth fruits, it at lead could bring forth flowers. Or, it could bow down discontented with itself. But that image of the fit tree petrified in the grey of its fruitlessness, dry (not less than the cross's wood), baren, stubborn, faithful to its relentless schedule, strong on its calendrical situation, faithful to the relentless date, haughty in its Pharisaic justice, unbothered by any doubt, it must have triggered the anger of the lord not less than the hustle of the of the pigeons sellers and of the money changers from within a dwelling place of holiness (*out of those ones' pale chip would have been grown up the fruitless fig tree?*). Christ, around Whom the

[12] *"Greater is the love than the rule"*, tells Protosyncellus Ghervasie-Hulubariu to Father Ioanichie Balan (*Spiritual Dialogues*, p. 347) and he continues: "When somebody knocks on your door, leave your praying rule and open him the door…". The fig tree didn't leave its rule but it locked itself even stronger into nature.

[13] In Caravaggio's painting *The Calling of Matthew*, on the publican's table there are a bunch of notes and of moneys, and around him the people waiting for him, with businesses. It is obvious that he abruptly left all the things and all the people.

wires of the killer plot were getting strained – let's not forget that Christ was in a rather just phase than in a merciful phase – so that he whipped one with the whip and He cursed the another.

Let's stay right, let's take heed, let's judge with much reckoning. Let's not endanger, for nothing in the world, the most precious wealth of ours: our soul, by offering to our Lord the pitiful, the worthless spectacle of some beings refuged in the evil and haughty stupidity of the accounting legalism. The accounting, the other name of the demonism, the preferred weapon and the steadfast work method of the enemy! Let's not allow Christ leave us hungry, deceived, with an empty heart, and with His soul pained. The rich young man left sad, but it is wide us to suppose that, looking at him leaving, the Lord would have been pained too. If Christ does us the unparalleled honor to address Himself to us, our lightening-like answer – not stopping at anything: real, sapient, sure – let it be only" "Lo me, Lord". The non-exalted answer, the non-exaggerated answer, foreign to any imprudence or delirium, a calm and nimble answer, for we know that the most real reality is called Christ. Christ now and forever. Christ "with time and without time". Christ, the owner of the keys of life, Lord of the Sabbath and of the time.

## THE CANANEAN WOMAN

The stages of the terrible exam which the Lord submits the Cananean woman to, in the land of Tir and Sidon, are the followings:

*The first state*: not being noticed, being ignored.

She comes into His way, melted down by happiness, she shouts out and begs Him; but He doesn't answer a word (Mt. 15: 23). She disregards her, she despises her, and one could say that He even mocks her, because what offense can be crueler than talking to somebody without receiving any answer, not even a word of upset or of rebuke? This silence, of ice and of distances, it is worse than the curse and it stings more awful than the insult.

*The second state*: rejection of the intervention of His beloved disciples. The Lord's Apostles, the disciples, the believers, His close ones, those whom He assured that they have been given to know the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heavens (Mt. 15: 11), and whose eyes see and whose ears hear what wanted to see and to hear - but they didn't see and they didn't hear – may righteous, prophets, and emperors (Mt. 13: 17), and who were entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom of Heavens and with the power of tying and untying on earth (Mt. 16: 19 and 18: 18; Jn. 20: 23), and who, when the Son of Man will sit on the throne of His glory they too will sit on twelves thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Mt. 19: 28), and whom He calls "My mother and My brothers" and He reassures them that they will eat and drink at the imperial table (Lk. 22: 30); they vainly intervene for the Cananean woman. They pray, and the Lord doesn't' listen to them, though on other occasions He uttered with His mouth: "He who comes to Me I won't get him out" (Jn. 6: 37). He took heed at the intervention made by the elders of Israel in support of the Roman centurion (Lk. 7: 4-5), but He overlooked His disciples' intervention for the Cananean woman!

*The third state*: declining His competence.

The words "I am not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (besides, these words were contradicted by "I have other sheep too which aren't from this stable") (Jn. 10: 16) constitutes what in juridical language is called as declination of competence and in the same time the only case in all the *Gospels*' content where the Lord shows himself as a observing the procedure.

He Who placed the ghost above the letter, He who proclaimed the fragility of the forms and Who powerfully defamed them, Who especially rebuked the Pharisees because of granting too much preeminence to the external in relationship with the internal and because they cleaned the outside of the glass and of the ball while leaving the inside filthy, because of them resembling to the tombs whitewashed beautifully on outside but full of bones and uncleanness, because, therefore, of placing the face above the content and the gestures before the heart, He Who had always been teaching how essential the substance is, He – this time – opposes to the Cananean woman an exception that is strictly procedural and formal; you case doesn't enter my attributions.

It was like telling her: let the plaintiff go to another office, she has no business here.

It is in this legalism, in this literal interpretation of the law, in this dryness and harshness of this procedural answer, not something that is unparalleled in the Gospels, but it is also contrary to the Christian ghost and to the constant reaction of the lord in the presence of the relationship between form and fund.

*The fourth state*: the insult, the offense, the rebuke.

After – with ice-like words – He declined His competence, Jesus passed to direct insults, to heavy offenses, and to the cynical mockery. He Who established than anyone who get angry on his brother will be worthy of damnation and he who tells his brother *raca* will be worthy to be judges by synedrium, and he who will call his brother a fool he will be worthy of the Gehenna of fire (Mt. 5: 22). In other words, by calling the plaintiff and her people as dogs – according to the most elementary logics – he defined her as a bitch.

So singular and so dissonant and amazing this episode in the earthly life of the Savior, so odd this scene (in total contrast to the *Gospels*' spirit), so that we cannot understand and interpret it but as representing the stages of an exam, of a probe, of a trial. Not the Lord of the mercy Who didn't come to judge the world but to save it (Jn. 12: 47) speaks to the Cananean woman, but the committer of an experience of testing a faith and a character.

And the candidate, how does she prove that she passes the test, what does she win by her exceptional grades and the price granted to her?

a) By *faith*. She, the pagan, the stranger, she comes with full trust to Christ and for no moment – during the whole time of the increasing in difficulties exam – she doesn't doubt, she doesn't get upset, she doesn't cede top the temptation of renouncing to continue asking and to leave from there and to mind her business, she doesn't show any sign of weakness;

b) By *Disinterest*. She doesn't ask for herself but for her daughter;

c) By *courage*. The courage of asking for the help of a Jew there on a Cananean soil. Then the courage of enduring the offenses, the insult brought her publicly. Finally, the courage (or the daring) not only for asking but even doing that by shouting out loud;

d) By *surety*. The Cananean woman perseveres, she doesn't give up, she seems to having known the parable of the unjust judge (and even more than that: knowing that this judge isn't unjust but only exigent. We may be allowed to suppose that the Cananean woman intuited the holy "game" of the Lord);

e) By *benevolence*, by impeccable politeness and undenied elegance. She is overlooked, she is rejected, she is banished, she if rebuked, she is insulted, she is mocked and reproached – but she still preserves, uninterruptedly, her calm, she doesn't cease behaving and answering with the greatest and most consummate decency. She *bows* before the Lord, she *throws herself to His feet* (Mk. 7: 25), she says: *Lord, help me*, and to the despising, atrocious, merciless prover with the bread reserved to the children and denied to the dogs, what does she replicate? Does she deny or protest that, does she denounce its cruelty, does she question it (as she could have done well – even inside the limits of the politeness)? No, not at all. She confirms it; she says: "Yes, *Lord*;

f) By *humbleness*. By approving the Lord's affirmation, *Yes, Lord*, the Cananean Woman proved a great humbleness too, because of admitting of being herself less worthy of His mercy than an animal (reckoned by the Oriental peoples as filthy);

g) By *intelligence*. Through a great and sharp intelligence, and a so unexpected and extraordinary and clever answer, and answer which the Lord – loving a sapient speech – must have been delighter for.

(Let's not lose form our sight the fact that the Lord, repeatedly, didn't despise the use of the human smartness and rationality: the given answer in the matter of the tithe, in the case of the woman caught in adultery, in the case of the woman successively married to seven brothers, in formulating the question regarding the baptism practiced by His forerunner John. On each time the Lord answers or asks with that superior cleverness of the mind, which overwhelms those who came to tempt Him).

So too the Cananean woman: polite, submissive, humble, btu also brightly intelligent, knowing how to answer promptly and ingeniously! And wisely! (It is in her answer a mix of wisdom, nimbleness, and subtlety which charms and overcomes).

That's why she passes her exam with flying colors and she is granted a grade above the maximum qualification. She took A plus. She stands out – only

her – among all the people whom Jesus did wonders to, for they believed in Him and for they begged Him, she is the only one getting the appellative: *Oh,* Woman! This exclamative vocative is absolutely unique in the content of the *Gospels*. Also unique is the adjective *great* form the syntagm *great is your faith*. To no one else the Lord told *great is your faith*. And also, nobody was found worthy of the honoring, of the chosen, of the supreme agreement: *be it to you as you wish*. Not (as to others) "according to your faith", but "as you wish". This is a nuance that must not be overlooked. The result, of course, is the same in all cases. The appreciation, likewise. But the expression mode differs - and it would be inappropriate us not to notice that. The Cananean woman is granted grace upon grace, one can limpidly see that the Examiner, after pushing her to her limits, he wants now to overwhelm her with the rewards: and He honors her as He know, abundantly, imperially.

The Cananean woman is rewarded accordingly and proportionally to the difficulty of the exam passed by her and according to the quality of her answers. The lord seems wanting to tell her: good job! I wanted you to be so! And the unusual harshness of the Lord can be explained (of course) only thus: by the decision to destine the Cananean woman to a higher degree exam.

The blessed Cananean woman! She took the first prize from the Teacher Who have mercy on many, Who praised a few, but Who unveiled Himself only to her, as an examiner firstly a merciless one and then overwhelming her with praises.

It is good deducing out of this parable that among the features pleasant to the Lord and which triggered His joy and admiration were: the faith, the disinterest, the courage, the perseverance, the humbleness, which we usually know as necessary and welcome. But the case of the Cananean woman shows us that equally powerful and precious are the qualities less underscored by some commentators: the politeness and the intelligence. The Lord loves the believers, the altruists, the perseverant. And He none the less loves the courageous, the decent, the intelligence. The fear, the cheekiness, the stupidity aren't pleasant to Christ. The Cananean woman – lacking of such ugly traits – tells it to us clearly. Her special success to the exceptional exam signifies the victory of some Christian virtues which are not enough extolled.

May the answer which we will give it at the end of our longer exam – that is the life of each of us – to find us worthy of Him granting us if not the grade "magna cum laude" obtained by the Cananean woman, at least worthy of some good grade so that we to be able to pass the exam!

## THE FEARSOME JUDGMENT

In the text referring to the Final Judgment (Mt. 25: 31-46) the accent suddenly falls upon the man. In the whole content of the New Law (as also of the Old Law) the priority granted to the love for God: the first commandment tells us to love Him with the whole our heart, with the whole our soul, with the whole our thought, and with the whole our power. The love for our neighbor, thought reckoned as not less important, it still is provisioned by the second commandment, somewhat subordinated to the first commandment, as some sort of consequence of the first commandment. It appears so to Matthew 22: 30; Mark 12: 31; and Luke 10: 27 ("Love your neighbor as on yourself" is also comprised by the Old Law: Leviticus 19: 18 – figuratively). During the future judgment, though, the love for the neighbor not only that passes in the first place, but it is also presented as the *only one* had in sight. Everything, here, it depends on the human relationships, and the whole discussion is only about deeds regarding the helping of our neighbor. The love for God isn't mentioned anymore – neither the faith that has crossed, according to the affirmations of Saint Apostle John (in his first general epistle, chapter two, as it is also mentioned in the Saint James epistle, also in the second chapter) in deeds and in the love for brothers – the defendants won't be asked about this one, but only if he gave food to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, if he visited the sick and the imprisoned. Everything, therefore, it is focused on the benefactions done to the burdened people who were surrounded by misfortunes and worries, to the neighbor who was in trouble.

The *Gospels* reiterate the idea widely exposed by Matthew 25: 31-46 and they specify that: "And then (the Son of Man) will reward each one according to their *deeds*" (Mt. 16: 27) or "And why are you calling Me: Lord, Lord, but you don't *do* what I am telling you?" (Lk. 6: 47). The key-words: *deeds* and *do* are highlighted by me. When, also, the Lord refers Himself to the ten commandments in that conversation with the man who wanted to know what he should do in order to inherit the eternal life, He mentions only the five commandments referring to the relationships with the people, and not the other five deriving from the worshipping owed to God; namely, He enumerates the obligation not to commit adultery, not to steal, not to confess crookedly, not to deceive, not to kill, and honoring one's mother and father.

The judgment, as we are seeing, it will be done also in the same ghost, on the ground of some factic criteria, worldly, practical, pragmatical. The Lords Himself, wanting to explain (Jn. 5: 27) for what reason He has been given by the Father the power to judge, He is indicating as cause: "for He is the Son of Man".

What does this motivation want to mean? That Christ is empowered to be Judge because He was a man too, so that He knows very well the people's nature, the world, and how the things are there on earth, which really are the reports among creatures, which are their needs, their worries, and their pains. Christ is Judge for He *knows* what the things are like *from within*, experimentally, as One Who knew, at His turn, the temptations, the tiredness, the hunger, the pain. Who faced the haughtiness, the envy, the hatred, the stupidity, and the betrayal. Who was sold, mocked, slapped on the face, spit in the face, and killed, in torments, and Whom they put on His head a thorns crown and Who was dressed up in a liar purple. As One judging *knowingly*, and not according to accounts spread by mouth, and as One Who knows what it is all about (*de quoi il en retourne*, as the French people say, expressively and untranslatably, but I'd still translate it as: who know the matter and all its underneath), and to Whom you cannot lie or twist the truth or hide the truth or mystify the truth by using beautiful words with skillful tricks. As One Who was man at His turn, as all people are, and Who will appreciate not according to theoretical, abstract, "divine" criteria, but according to very simple, very human criteria, *daily criteria*, banal, vulgar (let's not get scared by this term, let's not forget that the *Gospels'* language isn't pretentious, that it doesn't avoid calling the things openly by using their usual names), the criteria of "the man in the street", of the troubled man, of the tired man, locked up in grievances and non-spared by the life's waves. Of the average man, that man from the swirl and from the grind of the most-non-*Gospel*-like life, non-spiritualized, the criteria of the most elementary common sense. And which are those? Thos of the helping our neighbor (giving to the needy what they need in the first place: food, shelter, dwelling place, clothing, visiting in hospital and in jail), the good neighborhood, solidarity to them who are non-pampered by fate.

Absolutely nothing "exquisite" in the manner which the big Judgment is described to the poor (and needy, fairly speaking, are all of us born under the seal of the ancestral sin), nothing elegant, nor "superior", intellectualistic, mystic, Sophianic, transcendental, hesychastic, abyssal, apologetic, "idealistic", mystagogical, mysterious, Pythagorean, "sublime", extra-sensorial, or parapsychological. All the cases evoked by Christ at Matthew 25: 31-46 refer to needs and sufferings of the average people, of the people who experience too

little the impediments affecting the important people: sickness, hunger, need, prison (rightfully or wrongly). Lacking the basic goods of life, stricken by the misfortunes of the simple people, by the "daily" misfortunes: illness, poverty, hunger, bureaucracy, loneliness, and grief! The text doesn't take us to some secret knowledge, to some Platonic academia, to some sacred realm, but in streets or on roads and paths where the man strives and fights the tiring lacks which are majoritarian in a world called as sublunar by the romantic poets.

Christ will judge as any mortal – who doesn't' get drunk by drinking plain water - will do it, as any housemaid with many chores and a little time to waste in fatic discussions, as an individual stricken by his fate, crossed through the grind of the material life, stranger to any theological, philosophical, metaphysical, ascetic speculations and also to the discursivity rules. Nothing subtle in the whole content of the text from Matthew referring to the big day. It takes heed only at the deeds (elementary, raw, coarse) which would draw the attention and trigger the appreciative reaction of the people engulfed by the grievances and by the burdens of a daily life that is as far as possible from aestheticism, spiritual unrest, mental doubts, from all those totally different unrests of the one who doesn't know what worrying for tomorrow and for the bread for today means.

This will be especially surprising and strange and shaking, in the was of proceeding of the Son of Man, when He will sit on the throne of His glory transformed in judgment chair: this sudden coming back to simplicity and elementality, this exclusivity granted only to the good deeds, to the common giving of alms, to the love for the neighbor expressed in the terms of the philotimia and of the support among creatures made of the same dough and temporary hosts of the same ghost.

The criteria of the analyzed text are, shortly speaking, strictly "material", banal, trivial, on the understanding level and in conformity to the vision (*Weltanschauung*) "of the small people", of the humiliated and persecuted (as Dostoyevsky would like to say it) from a neighborhood from city's outskirts, or form a poor village, who ca fully taste the savor of a good deed. This is because the others, the "superb" ones (as the French writer Jules Romains calls them) barely can understand what are: the hunger, the nakedness, the hospital, the prison, the homelessness, and the need for being helped. They, the superb ones, they mainly experience the anxieties of the spirit and of the mind, the running after the notions manipulated by thought and similar things, noble of course, and necessary to the civilization and to culture, but protected by satisfying of the primary needs, so that they can dedicate themselves to a disinterested activity.

Lo that not of such subtleties (or even too beautiful impulses to consummation) will be Christ preoccupied with and will He take heed at, at the Final Judgment, but at much "coarser" things: will be rewarded not those who thought, mediated, philosophized, mythicized, but those whom – humanly, existentially, childishly, unsophisticatedly, on the level of the charcoal-miner or Jean-Jacques Rousseau, of Jacques Bonhomme, of Creanga's villagers, of the heroes of Bratescu-Voinesti, of Mary Poppins, of the fairytales and of the stories, of the guardian angel of the sapient children, of the nice people mentioned in so many stories belonging to all peoples – they would have helped, without whims or meanders, without hesitation and delay, and totally outside the too much analysis which is characteristic only to those who lack the contact with the harsh and relentless realities of the life and who are lost in their imaginary world (most of the time) of their cerebral constructions.

The Final Judgment, in Christian conception, it will be totally mysterious and differing from the comfortable conception of the Judaism. The pious Jew knows that if he obeyed the commandments from Decalogue and the six hundreds and thirteen commandments of the teaching, he will be saved. But in it not likewise in the case of the Christian who will face a fearsome judgment because of not knowing how the Judge will pronounce Himself. We know that the birth out of water and ghost, the faith, the good deeds, the non-rejecting and the not-being-shamed of Christ, the virtues and other similar things will be counted, but nobody has absolute certitude that he will be saved. The pericope so-called as of the Final Judgment still provided us with a precise set of rules and it places us on a solid ground, or great and unexpected humbleness of not (for most of us) naiveness too. There is a sure path, an undeceiving one, to a happy solution of the unbribed judgment: the modest path, stranger to fumes and extravagances, that path known from ancestral times and always suspected by our conscience to be the right path: the path of committing the good and of helping of those who are so plainly called by our religious texts as "in trouble". Christ, as we understand from the things told us by Saint Apostle and Evangelist Mattew, He will ask for this in the first place: how did we behave in the world with our brothers, with our neighbors, with our fellow humans, and with our enemies. He will ask us about our behavior in the relational world.

As in the case of the Crucifixion too, at Judgment there will take place a terrible and wonderful kenosis: The Lord transposes Himself *in* and He identified Himself with His most unfortunate creatures. He admits Himself being the thirsty, the hungry, the imprisoned... Probably, if He hadn't embodied Himself, the divinity wouldn't have mentioned the hunger, the thirst,

the nakedness. The hospital and the prison confess though the reality and the fulness of the embodiment, an *intimate* knowledge of the human condition, and visiting the ill and the imprisoned I reckon it as being the contribution of The One Who experimented, *in vivo* the bitterness of the loneliness and the sweetness of the compassion.

It remains curious the fact that the man (finite and infinite, as Heidegger so perseveringly defines the man) appears (at the very Final Judgment, where we would have expected the man to be take in account as "infinite") under the aspect of created and vulnerable being, as a little piece of a concrete community, with rudimentary needs, and not as some noosphere of Teilhard de Chardin type. But why would we wonder about that? As usually, Christ speaks and proceeds differently and even the opposite of what we would expect. This is a certain proof of authenticity. He truly put on a body, and we are going to be judged in the presence of the angels but by the Son of Man.

# II.
# *VERBUM DEI*
# - THE LIVING WATER -

## THE FALSE IDEALISM

The *Pericope of the Good Samaritan* (Lk. 10: 25-37), which is a pericope of the mercy and of the care for the needs and for the troubles of our fellow human, it evokes to us the false idealists who tirelessly tell us: why are you keep complaining and wailing because of not having enough bread and because of not eating to satiation? You are - they don't stop insisting and rebuking us - materialists, slaves to your belly, and too less Christians. Youa re complaining and murmuring all the time: but not the bread is the essential and not the bread will save you; the people, you know it very well, don't live only on bread!

These preachers of the idealism are most of the time recruited from among the satiated and stuffed with goods people of the world. Fully clear is the fact that they haven't read the parable of the merciful Samaritan and they cannot discern between necessity and excess. One is the covetousness of the belly, and different is the strictly necessary to life. They are right in what concerns thinking at the delicacies and pampering, but not when it comes about bread. They mention to us about restraint and asceticism, but they lose from their sight the fact that the asceticism is a voluntary business; when the asceticism is imposed not by an inward impulse but by an objective external situation, it loses any soteriological merit. Finally, the ones whom I would call as false idealists they prove not to know the teaching of Christ.

What did Christ do, what did He preach? He multiplied the breads and the fish and He transformed the water in wine. The Lord always manifested His care for the people's need for bread. He defended the Apostles when, because they were *hungry*, they plucked the wheat ears on Sabbat day (Mt. 12: 1 and the followings). He reckoned that David and his companions did well when, *being hungry*, they entered God's house, during the days of Abiadar the hierarch, and the ate the breads of the offerings which only the priests were allowed to eat (Mk. 2: 25-26). He satiated with bread once four thousand men and then other five thousand men, justifying the committed wonder like this: I have pity on the multitude for they have been with Me for three days and *they have nothing to eat*; And I don't want to let them go, *not to get exhausted on the way*" (Mt. 15: 32).

Lo how speaks and how does the authentic Jesus: not rebuking the people because of being slaves to their belly and because they think only at food, not by giving them idealistic advices and urging them to satiate themselves with the spiritual food (and it would have been easy to Him to ask them not to forget about having heard godlike words), not letting them to deal with their needs on their own, but satiating them plentifully (for there remained once seven and then twelve baskets of leftovers) and taking care for no one to faint on their way because of being hungry. But at the end of the chapter no. 25 of *The Gospel according to Faint Matthew*, where it is about the fearsome Judgment, as we are told what the Lord will proceed like, by separating the goat from the sheep, the good one from the bad ones, the blesses ones form the damned ones, what will the criterion for the separation be? It will be the way He was given *to eat* when he was *hungry*, or not (of course this criterion is trivial in the eyes of the "idealists"). For the daughter of Iair, the chief of the synagogue from Capernaum, after He commanded her: "Talita kumi" and resurrected her, what was his order on spot and undelayedly: they to give her *something to eat*! (Mk. 5: 43). What the Lord treated like that fig tree for not giving Him fruits when He was hungry? By cursing it! (Mk. 11: 14). And how Jesus self-characterizes? "A man eating and drinking wine" (Mt. 11: 19; Lk. 7: 34). The Lord is always ready and available to welcome His guests to dinner: He dines in the house of Zacheu, of Matthew-Levy, and even in the house of The Pharisee Simon the lepper (and probably not only in Simon's house, because the Pharisees, spying on Him, they would have invited Him in their houses and at their tables in order they to catch Him in His words more easily). Hod does the Lord call Himself? "The Bread of life", and He adds: "he who comes to Me *won't get hungry*" (Jn. 6: 35 and 48). And on the same occasion He defines Himself: "I am *the bread* that has descended from heavens" (Jn. 6: 43). Jesus, and that a fact, He doesn't get ashamed of speaking openly about hunger and about thirst and about good and about eating. What He resembled the Kingdom of Heavens to? To a dinner. And what He promises to him who opens the door to Him? That He will enter and He will dine with him (Apoc. 3: 20). After resurrection, what He convinced like the Apostles who were scared of Him that He would have been a ghost and they got disturbed? Eating in their presence fish and honey (Lk. 24: 41-43).

No, the Lord, blessed be His name, He wasn't that what in current language is called as "idealist", but He was a materialist for taking heed very openly, very participatory, at the problem of the bread.

Could this care for bread – which is ours too – a confession of the slavery to the belly, of lowly animalic preoccupation, of a coarse materialism?

This problem is solved definitively, I think, by Nicholas Berdyaev. The problem of the bread, says the great thinker, the problem of the bread to an individual as I am, who, I don't hide that, I am greedy and I know the tendency for complaining and for being discontent, it is, yes, a material problem. But the problem of the bread of my neighbor, continues Berdyaev, it is no longer a material problem but it is *a spiritual duty*. Let's take heed, shivering with respect, to the changing in the tonal register: when I and my covetousness are in case, I the complaining and lusting individual, the bread it a problem. But when I am preoccupied with the bread of my neighbor, the *problem* becomes *a duty*, it jumps form the material realm to the spiritual realm.

Lo the best answer given to the false idealists. If instead of complaining for myself I deplore the needy, that speaking-against becomes compassion and it take a totally different countenance.

And we also mention to the so-called idealists that the Lord doesn't give Himself to us to consume Him in ideality or abstraction, but on the mode of the reality: as bread and wine. And what else are those if not the two consubstantial elements of the life: the bread (the All-Clean Body) for maintaining the life and the wine (the All-Cherished Blood) for sweetening and gladdening the life? This is for the human being is not created only for living, for existing (in an animalic manner), and for toiling, but also for consciously rejoicing for life, for tasting the life and for extolling during hours of resting and souly exaltation. The wine symbolizes this last characteristic of the being endowed with ghost and with the grace of blessing. The bread, the wine, together and dually, they constitute the balance of our life, they metaphorize our life and, in the same time, they explain our life and they condition it.

What title has given to his beautiful novel the Italian writer Ignazio Soline? Just that: *The Bread and the Wine*. And to the profligate son coming back to his parental hearth, what they show him firstly, in the poetry of Trakl? The bread and the wine – shining in clean light (*da serlanzt in reiner Heile*) – on the table.

And how does the Lord teach us to pray in the lordly prayer (so synthetic, so concentrates in essences)? Not asking for us to be given that bread for existence?

The false idealism doesn't seem to me anything else but hypocrisy, lack of love for the neighbor, vain grandiloquence and non-Christianity. The good Samaritan got closer to the misfortunate and he bandaged his wounds, he anointed his wounds with oil and he spread wine on those wounds, and he put him on his donkey and he took him to the guest house to be taken acre of and nourished. Lo the idealism in action. The false idealism is but the Pharisaism

and it is identified to the behavior of the priest and of the Levite who passed indifferently by the one who was in need. (They would have granted him, in their mind, idealistic consolations: he would have better stayed at home rather than wandering from here to there).

Christ teaches us not to despise the bread, not to parade our Pharisaic idealism, and not to be indifferent – as were the priest and the Levite – to the hunger, the thirst, the sufferings, and the troubles of our brother.

The bread, in the Lord's teaching, it is holy. And it was holy from old for the entire people. Both from cities and form villages. Especially in our beautiful villages where have been preserved unchipped our Christian and ancestral traditions, where it can be seen so obvious the continuity of the national character, and where if a piece of bread is dropped on the floor they will pick it up; the bread is placed only in a clean place, of honor; it is offered, together with the salt, to the important guests, only by the head of the family, always taking care of scoring in it the sign of the Holy Cross with the knife's tip.

The bread is life giver and supporter. Through the mediation of the bread, trans-substantialized, we are given a consumption of the lord's Body. Not only with bread will live the man, of course, but neither without bread as long as his soul hasn't been liberated from the body's clay. Christ didn't foretell the "idealism" (the so-called and stupid and hypocrite idealism of the hypocrites), but on the opposite, He expressed His attentive care (attentive, serious, parental) for the bread towards existence, the daily bread, of His creatures.

## LORD, I WANT TO SEE!

Our Lord heals the people of blindness repeatedly. The *Gospel according to Matthew* mentions two cases[14] and in both those cases if about blind people. Mark[15] mentions only one case, that of Bartimaeus. Luke[16], also one case, localized in Jericho. And *The Gospel according to John* consecrates an entire chapter – the nineth – to the healing of the blind from birth. In the synoptic *Gospels* the blinds are the ones soliciting the mercy and the healing. At John seems that Jesus worked by His own initiative. The Lord, in the synoptic versions asks the blind what they want Him to do to them. And the blind answer identically (in slightly different words): Lord, our eyes to be open; Teacher, I to see again; Lord, I to see! And this ask is fulfilled to them immediately.

Of course, the blind were imploring for their sight to be granted to them, a physical sight, the possibility for their eyes to exercise their natural function: the recording on retina the views of the external world. And Jesus, doubtlessly grants them just that: this organic, physiological, photographical possibility.

But the question we can ask to ourselves is whether the Lord commits not only the removal of a corporal (functional) illness, but even more than that? (Regarding the blind from birth He obviously gives him grace upon grace. He unveils Himself as Son of God). If, the renewed wonder of the healing of the blind doesn't comprise also a hidden, spiritual teaching... The words from *The Gospel according to John* (9: 39): "I have come into this world for they who cannot see, they to see, and they who can see, they to be blind" justify – like also His identification to the light – this suspicion, the impulse for searching for a symbolic, unapparent meaning of the words: *blind*, *eye*, *light*, and *to see*.

This is because seeing – in a direct, proper sense – are the Pharisees too, but they are blind. And all of us see, good of bad, we see well, and even too well. We see too well the *others*, our fellow humans and our neighbors (who compose our hell, says Jean-Paul Sartre), we see all the straws form their eyes, to the very spec which should have been spared of our detective fury by its tiny

[14] Mt. 9: 27-30; 20: 30-34.
[15] Mk. 10: 46-52.
[16] Lk. 18: 35-42.

size. We watch – relentlessly, tirelessly, insatiately – all their gestures, hoping that we could detect mistakes, sins, turpitudes which we to get thrilled of, achieving thus the right to start shouting out with a loud voice and to unchain the public opprobrium against them; or at least some habits or manias on the ground of which we to mock them and rebuke them. We find out, with accountant exactness – all their deviations, even innocent the ones, from the norm, we use this sense of sight, we use this watching action of our sight for our sleepless and enemy vigilance, we use it for fueling up and refreshing our hatred, our disgust, our strife, and then for establishing an objective and moral foundation for our hot propension to slander and to trigger the so pleasant and always savory and inexhaustibly delighting show of the suffering and collapse and perdition of our neighbor.

"Lord, I to see" can mean, besides the will of regaining the simple visual capacity (which is confounded to the defamation and to the condemnation of the people from around) also something else: the possibility of seeing, of observing (better said), of memorizing, of noticing not only the defects, the mistakes, and the shortcomings (or the bad traits) specific to others (in other words not only some sort of awful and stubborn anthropomorphism), but also the nature with its adornments, the art's products and its inviting features, and the good deeds of our fellow humans and they acts of holiness and heroism (rare, but not inexistent, not excluded), shortly speaking: *The splendor of this world*. "I to see" can signify also the shaking up of the fixation of the hideous things (effective, supposed, or transmuted from within us upon others), widening our visual field (which not to be limited to detecting for denouncing the others' errors and weaknesses but to embrace also everything that in this world enslaved to the sin still certifies the work of the ghost: the art, the kindness, the sacrifice, the benevolence, the compassion, the courage, the devotion, the beauty, the faithfulness), our awakening out of the nightmare of the hatred and of the intolerance.

"I to see" can, therefore, mean also the hope for access to a "narrow" path which lead closer to the Lord. To the exclamation: "Lord, I to see" it is plausible to be attributed a second meaning too, a mysterious meaning. This last and cryptic meaning is maybe the true and main meaning, for not implying only a restricted category of handicapped people, but the whole mankind. In this semantics *to see* wants to tall us above anything *to see on ourselves*. What does Christ bestow more valuable to him who believes in Him? What extraordinary faculty He put it at his hand? That of *seeing on himself* as the people around him see him, as he is reckoned and qualified even by his most stubborn defamers. Suddenly, by the grace of Christ, we see in reality our nothingness,

our wickedness, and our pitiful lowness. We get out of ourselves. We leave ourselves. We impropriate a psychical antigravitational force. Christ opens the eyes of all of us, not only to the blind. And He triggers in our memory an anamnestic process of unparalleled intensity, by reminding to out conscience of all the evil things we have committed somewhen. This is, probably, the essence of the act of conversion, this is the first and the most surprising and the fieriest effect of the meeting of our Savior, with our Unveiler. I become, as the Apostle says, a new creature. But previously, it is revealed to us, as in a lightening, our former creature, as chained in its countless lawless deeds. And for a while (*for three days I was blind*) I won't see, namely I will see only on myself, the obsessive and frightening phantom of the being I have been until being stricken and engulfed by the light of the imperial mercy.

Suddenly, the vail drops – and we see. And what do we see? We see on ourselves, firstly. I see on myself, completely, unfaked, undeceived, and not from within. Between being and self, there is now a huge distance, a precipice. I am shaking and I am getting thrilled, as at the Final Judgment. I don't' have anything which I to lean on, I don't have any shelter, I don't' have anybody to call to my help. It is proven true the remark of Marcel Jopuhandeau: I don't;' fear God for he is all-king, but I fear myself: because of being I free and evil I cannot open the door to Him. The Final Judgment will be done by the Christian upon himself, if he wants, even daily, rather accusing himself than defending himself. The conscience examination, at the end of each day, that is recommended both by morals and by psychoanalysis, what really is if not a Final Judgment done reflectively and individually by the Christian? Psychoanalytically and eschatologically, the Christian sees himself at this exam and he values himself exactly as the Righteous Judge does, from outside himself, non-indulgently, as some stranger, or as somebody else. And he is able – despite the Michelson-Morley law – to judge on himself equally coldly, impartially, *absolutely*, as on his fellow human. The Christian, by this, he escapes from under the fencings of the general relativity, he denies the Michelson-Morley experience, and he obeys the great urge of his Teacher: he succeeds in getting out of his minds.

Lo the great gift from Christ: He blesses us with this wonderful, supra-natural possibility of toppling over the principles of the thermodynamics, the ipseity, the personal equation; we see on ourselves as we are (and without us needing to resort to the hypothesis of having us an astral body), and not as we would like to reckon ourselves (sheltered against any possible accusation); endowed only with rights and qualities, righteous, master of the world, superior to all imbeciles, to lawless perpetrators, and to the nescient from the globe, and

especially to those from the energetic field of our imperial person. The charming illusion ceases. The Christian starts – under the action of the grace – to be disgusted and dreaded of himself (as, probably, he is felt by people around him too). He no longer reckons himself as righteous and just, always being right and enduring troubles only because of others and exclusively because of their relentless hatred on him, he no longer thinks that is it permitted everything and that other people around him have the exclusive duty of admiring and extolling him.

I to see. Namely: I to see myself. I to be able to condemn myself, now, before the general judgment, equally unbiasedly at then. Or even more severely, for our Righteous Judge will be, anyway, gentle and merciful; for that is His nature. The Final Judgment, previous and preparing, we can think at it as being the supreme charisma granted to the Christian, for it is the most useful and the most beneficial to our presentation to the Judgment in as easing and possible conditions for the mandate entrusted to the good angels.

I to see. I to see with my bodily eyes. More broadly: the whole by body to be healthy and functioning without mistake, informed by the five undiminished senses. Even much broader: I to see freely, unchained from the abject squeeze of focusing my looks on the straws (or also of the beams) form the eyes of my neighbors. I to understand all the world's splendors; I to rejoice myself, I to clean myself, I to elevate myself, I to be consoled through them. They to be to me spring of exaltation and of happiness, of fading away my wickedness and my stupidity which concentrically are assaulting me. I to mee on myself as I am: from exterior, with foreign eyes, getting rid of my mercy for myself. I to keep my ese ceaselessly open (having my eyelids blocked open like the hero from *The Mechanical Orange* when submitted to reeducation) and directed rather upon myself. Christ conveys upon us something of His light; one could say that we can handle a torch, a flashlight, a laser, and even from this realm we can know the unparalleled sensation of our total unveiling. The experiences recounted by doctor Moody can be accomplished by the Christian without needing a clinical death. The Christian can leave himself, and he can cross the *blind* shell of the self – like floating, as the patients of doctor Moody, over the bodily image – and he can accept an examination where any complacency to be absent from, or any getting emotional, or any subterfuge of the formal self, capable of seeing clean and cold.

May this feature given, by Christ, to any man (*The true Light which lightens every man who comes into the world)* to be us able to put it in practice, thanking Him Who has entrusted it to us, towards our detachment from the shackled of the darkness.

“I am the light of the world”. You, the victorious upon the darkness, get us out of the narrow, black prison where by ourselves, because we are stupid and evil, we have walled ourselves in.

## THE CONFESSIONS OF THE LORD

The Lord, at the end, after he soke openly to His disciples and after He confessed Himself wholly to them (Jn. 16: 29: "Lo that You are talking now openly and without any parables"), He admitted Himself as what He truly was, in the presence of the worldly authorities as well: in front of the synedrium and of the hegemon Pilate. The *Gospels* use four formulas whose content is the same: *You say that*, *You said that*, *I am and you will see*... Besides these public, official, necessary declarations, there is also a number of spontaneous admissions, acausal, hidden, which have as well their deep signification. They are *proprio motu* confessions of His.

The whole living of the Lord, and especially the years of His preaching activity, as also all the wonders committed by Him, they all confess His quality as Son of God, the culminant point of His full unveiling being, doubtlessly, His transfiguration, His total and indubitable unveiling of His Godhead. The moment on which – according to the *Gospels'* texts – He declares, unprovokedly, in an intimate circle, totally spontaneously and in the same time plainly and not allusively, not in parables, not indirectly, also His quality as son of the Heavenly Father, it seems to me that one can count six of them – and on all these cases the admission they have a voluntary character, unexpected, tempestuous, discrete. The Lord confesses on Himself:

### 1. The Bling from Birth

Jn. 9: 35-38: "Hearing Jesus that they threw him out and encountering him He told him: Do you believe in the Son of God? He answered and said: And who is him, Lord, for I to believe in Him? And Jesus said: You have already seen Him! Just Him Who is talking to you. That one is".

Why to the former blind man? For he behaved well. He didn't go to denounce Him to the pharisees[17]. He kept himself strong despite being abundantly harassed. He extolled the Lord. He wasn't ashamed of Him. He confronted, fearlessly, the Pharisees. He gave the admirable answer (Jn. 9: 30): "Just of this consists the wonder that you don't know where He is from but He has opened my eyes".

The Lord cherishes the former blind man, He likes him, He likes his courage and his gratitude[18] and his strength. That's why too He confesses on

[17] Christ spoke differently to the man with palsy, an old sinner, a denouncer. To that one He told only: "From now on you won't commit sin not to be worser to you" (Jn. 5: 14).

[18] Analogue to that of the tenth healed leper, the only one who turned back to thank for his healing. The other nine were healed at their turn, but only the tenth got saved too.

Himself to the former blind with some kind of joy, quickly, and in order to consolidate him as quickly as possible and unhesitatingly, because he had to endure the rebuke because of Him (As, if I am permitted this daring comparison, Cuza Voivode kissed the peasant who was spit in his face by the boyar). What way Him to reward the former blind for that? By the most valuable gift He could bestow, by the supreme honor, by the overwhelming supra-honoring of the sharing of the great mystery: He makes to the former blind *the supreme honor* of confessing Himself to the former blind as being the Son of God. This mystery – which is unparalleled – He entrusts it *ex abrupto* and *stante pede*. Like an emperor who on the battle field plucks off his own decoration and bestows it to a valiant warrior.

This time too, the Lord doesn't give little by little or parsimoniously. He doesn't give in a petty way, but like a rich Lord, according to His habit. He doesn't tell to the healed one: I am a healer with hidden powers… No! He *declares* on Himself in an absolute manner: I am the Son of God! As to a disciple, as to a brother, as to a friend, as to a *confidant* of His, as to a secret councilor, as to a trusted man. *He entrusts on Himself to him*. In other words, He tells to the former blind that what he followed to tell later on top the thief: "Today you will be with Me in Paradise".

**2. To Martha**

John 11: 25-27: "And Jesus told her: I am the resurrection and the life, he who believes in Me, even if he dies, he will be alive. And anyone living and believing in Me he will never die. Do you believe these things? She told Him: "Yes, Lord. I have believed that You are Christ, the Son of God Who has come into the world".

Here the Lord provokes the confession of the believer. He asks her and she gives the right answer.

Maybe the Lord regretted being somewhat harsh and that He rebuked her (*Martha, Martha*…). Maybe she seemed to Him too dedicated to the chores (worldly) and then He wanted to give her the occasion to shake off those chores and worries and to worship Christ; in order her to get out from under the influence of the earthly adverse forces, of the worries (even non-sinner, even useful, but still grabbing) which actually are thorns, those sort of thorns which chock up the good seed.

To them who could have thought (or they even had thought) that the Lord not only rebuked Martha but He also rejected her, it is now obvious that it wasn't so; He rebuked Martha, of course, but He hadn't banished her away. Now He rehabilitates her, He proves His full trust in her, by giving her the

expiatory occasion for confessing Him non-reticently, and solemnly, catechistically. Just in order there no longer to persist any doubt upon the equal faith and the equal status of the two women. (Martha being a lass mystical nature, it was more appropriate to her to utter her creed in a canonical form).

Martha is, therefore, expressly rehabilitated and placed on the same level with her sister.

**3. To the Apostles**

Mt. 16: 15-17: "But who do you say I am? Answering, Simo Peter said: You are Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus, answering, told him: Blessed are you, Simon, son of Johan; for not body and blood unveiled you these things, but My Father Who is in heavens" (see also Mk. 8: 29; Lk. 9: 20).

On other occasion (Jn. 6: 69), consequently to the question: "Don't you too want to go?", Simon-Peter answered as above: "Lord, whom are we going to? You have the words of the eternal life. And we have believed that Youa re Christ, the Son of the living God".

The Lord, again, He doesn't' contradict Peter. On the contrary, he confirms him, this time, by joyfully exclaiming, but with lass solemnity, as seemingly approving on Himself: "Haven't I chosen you, the twelve ones?". (But not without correcting Himself: and still one of you is devil).

**4. To the Samaritan Woman**

Jn. 4: 25-26: "The woman told Him: We know that Messiah will come Who is called Christ; and when That One will come, He will herald us everything. Jesus told her: I am, The One talking to you".

This confession is identical to that made to the blind form birth. Why does the Lord enunciate it this time too? For He liked the courage, the smartness, the strength, and the impetuousness of the woman. She didn't seem to Him as cheeky, but only strong, intelligent, and easy talking. Just this stirred up His content (and who knows, maybe His inward smile too): her tone: free, fearless, unhypocritical, open, examining, steadfast, daring, hearty, a little haughty. (Haughty not meaning here pride and self-confident, but steadfastly established in her posture of rational being disposed to believe, but not gullible). These daring traits, to which the insolence isn't added, though they are at the edge of the good manners, the Lord liked them, for He was a great lover of courage, of intelligence, and even of daring and of firm characters (the Cananean woman, the insistent widow), and of one-piece people. But He doesn't reckon as worthy the lukewarm, the flatterers, the hesitant, the

hypocrite. And the Samaritan woman is anything but fearful and neither she falters Him not hypocritically gives up to Him (when Christ tells her that she doesn't have a husband, she doesn't contradict Him, she doesn't hide herself, but she immediately realizes that she is in the presence of a prophet, or even of Messiah). She tells Him what she believes and what she thinks, and she doesn't avoid speaking "with a loud voice" to the Lord, or even to ironize Him a little: *Lord, you don't have a bucket and the well is deep: where therefore You have that living water*?

The Samaritan woman is rationalistic, positivistic, practical (she belongs to the mental category of Saint Thomas), she is smart, she judged logically' she doesn't have a locked up mouth, she is talkative, she it standing, she has a communicative nature of a peasant woman or of a city woman having experience of life, she doesn't know the shyness or the meanders, like - if this profane comparison would be permitted to us – the characters of Creanga.

This simplicity, this daring, this nimbleness, this sincerity, this wisdom of Samaritan Smaranda woke up the Lord's sympathy and attention – therefore He confesses on Himself to her! Of course, because she proved to be both *woman* and *character being*, and not some whining person, or lacking the holy gift of the speaking openly and of recognizing the theophany when deigning to manifest and in the most unexpected and non-exceptional circumstances!

**5. To Nathanael**

John 1: 49-50: "Nathanael answered Him: Rabbi, You are the Son of God, Youa re the king of Israel. Jesue answered him: For I told you that I was you under the fig tree, you believe? Greater things that this you will see".

Here, Nathanael, unprovoked, he confesses Jesus as Son of God, and the Lord doesn't deny that but He promises him the most consummate unveilings; and He even tells them (to Natanael and to Philip and to the people from there): "Verily, verily I am telling you, from now on you will see the heavens opening and the angels of the lord ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (verse no. 51).

The answer is eschatological and apocalyptical.

What stimulated Natanael's confession? The fact that the lord noticed him under a fig tree, He took heed at him and defined him: "Lo an Israelite whom there is no cunningness within".

The whole episode stays under the sign of the seen and of the unseen, of the sight. Natanael was seen and qualified. (*Counted*, *weighed in,* and not *divided* but confirmed and blessed). Namely: chosen. The happiness and the enthusiasm urge the grace state of Natanael who – as in the prophecy of Joel –

is in awe, in *vision*, and he confesses. He didn't need more than to know that he was seen. Here everything takes place telegraphically, by direct transmission of the thought, on *essential* plane, at the speed of the light, of the wind, and of the spiritual communication (the Lord Himself resembled the ghost to the wind). Under the sign of the sight and of the eyes of the lord (Who judges and measure Natanael *by eyes*). His eyes *catch Natanael*, who himself *has eyes* and who *cannot believe his eyes* because of happiness. Everything takes place instantaneously, on the spiritual communication level, with a short photographical exposition, on the measure of the simultaneity.

The Lord homologates, therefore, Natanael's declaration, and the He develops it, He strengthens it eschatologically, apocalyptically, metaphorically; instead of limiting Himself to say: Yes, I am, he describes on Himself on the Judgment Day, on the final moment of the Glory, he describes – to Natanael and to the other disciples – the painting of the Lord's Day. One could say that the enthusiasm and the euphoria are contagious, and that they passed form Natanael to Christ – Who, as in the case of the blind from birth, of Martha, of Peter, of the Samaritan woman – renounced to any prudence and secretness. He rejoices with the ghost into Himself for encountering creatures worthy of knowing Who He truly is. And he consummately renounces to His anonymity, and the meeting with Natanael does that, one could say, with a special iconographical fervor due to the enchanting ascertainment of a conversion based on no matter what.

**6. The Good Thief**

Luke 23: 42-43: "And he told Jesus: Remember me, Lord, when You will come in Your Kingdom. And Jesus told him: Verily I am telling you, that today you will be together with Me in Paradise".

From where it turns out that the good thief recognizes the Lord as emperor of the heavens and as God. And the Lord confirms to him directly and as categorically as one can get. "Spatially": in *Paradise*; "Temporally": *today*; hypostatically: *with Me*. Lo another complete confession of the Lord: today, in Paradise, with me. The only possible conclusion: I am the Son of God; the Father and I are one.

What does the Lord reward here? The profoundly dramatic character (shaking) of the confession made on the cross and about to die; the humbleness (*us too, for we admit the due things…*), the repentance, the suffering (which is towards benefit). The confession of the good thief is the more valuable as it is done in torments and it is of one who (allow me to call him thus) is the suffering colleague of the Lord (the Holy Mother, the prudes, the

beloved disciple, Josephus of Arimateea, Nicodemus, and the others suffer awfully, a sword crossed through their hearts, but *they aren't on the cross*; the pains of the good thief are *identical* to the pains of the Lord). His awful suffering isn't to this thief towards despair, towards grief, and towards lust to curse (as to the other thief), but his suffering is towards compassion, towards modesty, towards gentleness, towards hope. His suffering it towards his betterment and that's why the Lord saves him and he confesses on Himself as God too and He assures him that he will be the first inhabitant of the regained Eden.

In all these cases of private confession one can ascertain that the Lord rewards certain qualities and behaviors which determine Him to unveil on Himself out of simple enthusiasm and unbridled joy. (or, maybe, in order Him to do justice to Martha). These are secret confessions, non-mandatory, unceremonious, unlike the public confessions (to Pilates, to the synedrium), or the final confessions (to the Apostles, before His sufferings). That's why, these confessions are all the more emotional, more propitious to our meditation and trembling, for we are His believers who confess, each one according to his own powers, from the whole our heart, from the whole our soul, and from the whole our thought, as we confess Him as our Lord, Emperor, and God.

## THE LIVING WATER
## (The Samaritan Woman)

If the episode with the Cananean woman can be reckoned as the recount of a (very severe) exam, the episode with the Samaritan woman isn't but the recount of a fierce and merciless duel.

The scene, as in the classic theater, it is deprived on infamous props. Everything takes place on the level of the spiritual confrontation, as in the tragedies of Corneille or Racine. There stay there, face to face, I the silence and in the heat of the summer noon, in the center of the empty landscape, having as sole focal point the fountain (and the presence - unseen – of the water element will soon be completed by the manifestation of the Ghost Himself – two *characters*, two *powers*, two *liberties*. Christ recognized that woman who came to draw water as one of those natures which are not lukewarm and who was worthy of being provoked and conquered by Him.

Christ's encounter with the Samaritan woman, as recounted by Saint Apostle John (4: 4-12) – not differently that the encounter of James with the Lord's angel (Genesis 32: 4 and the followings) – it is the representation of a duel. The analogy between the two clashes is striking: both James and the woman from Sychar had what the psychologists call as outstanding personality and the have life experience on earth. Christ has to fight (and to conquer) a living and powerful human being, a steadfast woman, a stubborn woman who is master on her rights, a human being endowed with intelligence and judgment, proud, ironical, quarreling. The Lord accepts her as she is, He adapts Himself to the tactics, to the tricks, to the rules, to the patience, and to the impetuousness of the duel, but also to His great unwritten law which all the thing submit to: being Him victorious at all costs!

That's why the Lord proceeds in the first place, without hurry, by highlighting the haphazardly aspect of the encounter and seemingly testing, measuring, examining His opponent; only at the end and only after having understood the vulnerable spot of His duel-partner – her matrimonial situation (*you said well that you have not husband…*) – He will give (like a surgeon: he isolates the abscess before cauterizing it) the big blow, the final blow, the irresistible blow: *I am, the One talking to you.*

The dialogue, in parallel to the duel, it sparks from the first crossing of the swords:

- Christ (shortly): Give me to drink.

- The Samaritan woman (quarreling, proud, intending to immediately put a distance, let's she seem flattered for a Jew is talking to her, namely to place herself in an inferiority position): How, you a Jew, are talking to me?!...

- Christ (starts the offensive): It would be natural you to ask Me for drinking.

- The Samaritan woman (ironical, speaking with superiority): You don't' even have a bucket... (increasingly ironical, passing even into cheekiness): Are you greater than our father James?

- Christ (attacks form a different direction): He who drinks the water I give him won't even be thirsty again.

- The Samaritan woman (naughty, but also rational, practical, understanding that out of that discussion she could take a big benefit): Yes, given me that water so that I won't again come here and tire myself.

- Christ (Who knows what her vulnerable spot is, he attacks by surprise, from a totally different angle, as an experienced fencing master): Call here your husband.

- The Samaritan woman (unhypocritical, non-liar by nature): I have no husband.

- Christ (start unveiling Himself): You have told the truth... You had five...

- The Samaritan woman (know how to bow down before the truth): You are a Prophet!

- Christ (he is unveiling Himself increasingly more) enunciates two principles: a) the hour will come *and it is now*; b) we owe to worship God only into Ghost and truth.

- The Samaritan woman (sniffing the final truth, foreboding it): Messiah-Christ will come.

- Christ (unveiling on Himself, conveying the final blow, defeating her): I am!

In His brief eschatology Christ underscores the present time: *now it is*. To Christ all the things are in present, outside time, as Aldous Huxley wrote after around two thousand years: *The time must come to an end*. Christ is outside time; He is in eternity. But He speaks to the Samaritan woman as an embodied. Now, here: it is the moment of the Baptism, of the faith, of the salvation. And of choosing: to be with or without Christ. At Sychar the time still was in suspension. But why it is written: *will come* and *now it is*, why isn't used the simpler formulation: the time has come? This is in order to be obvious the ground of the prophecy, of the promise. Transforming the sentence in a phrase give, on the other hand, to the affirmation, a royal, shaking note: *and*

*now it is*; the hesitations, the delays, the reserves are banished away, are untied. In the same time, it is underscored another trait of the Christianity: the worshipping into ghost, not *ratione loci*, on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem, but everywhere. The Christianity is universal, it doesn't know of national fencings, territorial, or of any other sort. Any segregation is non-Christian. Regarding the words: "You worship whom you don't know, we worship whom we know", they are framed into an ecumenist vision of the Christianity. This is because those words refer not only to the Samaritans, but to all the precursory of the lord, they too animated by the Holy Ghost to a certain extent and representing partial fore-imaginings of the revelation: mainly to Moses, then to Buddha, to Lao-Tse, to Confucius, to Socrates, to Plato, to Aristotle and to the "saints' and "sybils", who are painted on the walls of many Orthodox churches, proving their tolerance and universality. The Islamism, ulterior to the life on earth of Christ, it too comprises this chain of spiritualized forerunners, as decently are called in Quran, our father Abraham, the Holy Virgin, and the Lord Himself, a fact mentioned, not without emotion, by F. M. Dostoyevsky in *Memories from the House of Death*.

As a lightening from the blue and hot sky falls the confession of the Lord: so sudden, so non-reticent, so total! As usual, Christ doesn't deal with half-measures: when He gives, He gives royally, when He unveils on Himself, He does that consummately. To the Samaritan woman, to the bling from birth: *I am*. I Who is talking to you, I from in front of you. Bu by alluding of deductions: directly. And the Samaritan woman, after she resisted, ironized Him, and was naughty, suddenly – as James did yore (the maker of the fountain which the present scenes is taking place) – gives up and surrenders herself. She totally surrenders herself, symmetrically to Christ Who has unveiled on Himself entirely, unconditionally, and she obeys Him mastered by a tremble, and engulfed with love, just like – and I hope that nobody will be offended by this comparison – at the end of the dialogue between Elizabeth Bennet and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*, by Jane Austen, where, following to the reciprocal defiance, the man and the woman finally realized that they were made for one another.

And without delay, also suddenly, also lightening (the rhythm of the *Gospel* is no longer a slow one and the movements are no longer of surrounding but of frontal attack and of decisive changes), after Christ leaves His anonymity, she, conquered, becomes an Apostle. Now she is engulfed by her love for Christ, she is convinced, she has experience metanoia, she is *a new creature*. And she runs to the city. Why? To herald Christ, to preach the *Gospel*, to spread the good news, as a true disciple of the lord. She, steadfast

and daring, but noble and courageous, by experiencing her sweet defeat, she no longer resorts to subtleties, she no longer disputes, she no longer argues; her care is for something else in this phase of the wondrous happening: to hurry up and proclaim *coram populo*: Messiah I among us! She is a heralder of Christ and His host, as Zacheus was too, for the Lord tarries for two days in Sychar and he very probably dwelled in her house.

The scene from the Chapter no. 4 of the *Gospel according to John* is of a great dramatical intensity, in increasingly quicker cadence, in an ever-quicker *tempo*. The duel, lo, the sole image that it can evoke, the duel as in the great classical tragedies.

The noblesse of the Cananean woman is proven in faith, in courage, in perseverance, in decency, and in intelligence. Thew courage of the Samaritan woman is proven by the way she gives up, without hesitations, with enthusiasm, after she first resisted by using all her powers and all the skills of her mind. She, when the truth is revealed to her, she admits it and she bears all consequences immediately. *Now it is*. Neither postponing, nor doubt, neither shyness. On the spot she starts announcing Messiah, to proclaim His presence, to let everybody know what is happening in their country, what unimaginable honor they have been found worthy of, what non-verisimilar joy they are called to be part to. Like Jesus wants: He wants people called by Him to *immediately* become His, by leaving all the things together, by not being stopped by any business, by no reason, by no any other duty, be it regardless how natural or clean. The field, the trade, the wedding, the funeral – trivia, *nugas*! as called by the ancient poet. The Samaritan woman, who we are justified to imagine not so appreciated in her city, she no longer cares about what the people would say: right among her people (where it would have been harder to do it, as to Jesus as well) she hurried up to extoll the Lord, to be His servant and heralder.

The Samaritan woman is an admirable example of the way which the Lord work in, in His quality of hunter (of people) Who is especially attracted by the difficult to hunt game, attracted by disciples of *hard character*, who resist Him, but they are also able to surrender themselves to Him in ghost and in truth, immediately (not after a day, or after a quarter of an hour). He liked a persecutor as Saul of Tars, a passionate whore like Mary the Egyptian, a hardened publican as Zacheus, a quarrelling woman like the Samaritan woman; He didn't like the pale faces, the executioners, the whining ones, the sifters of mint and cumin, the hypocrites, the bearer of long coats with long fringes, the zealous candle-lighters. He loved Simon-Peter because of being among the genre of the fiery, tempestuous, and impatient individuals.

In this duel, not a formal one, the Samaritan woman is mortally wounded, and not with a causing-of-death blow but with a causing-of-eternal-life blow. No, the Lordc didn't lie to her: he truly bestowed her living water, the water of the without-dusk life, and she was transformed from a haughty opponent into His disciple and then martyr.

We can also ask ourselves: why, in order to convey His double message, Christ preferred the path of the dialogue, of the duel? In order Him to give, probably, to His message – the necessary instantaneity of any conversion that will no longer look back, and the non-spatiality of any courageous faith and of any true creed – a dramatic and dynamic unstoppable intensity. The dialogue is imprinted into thought and into feeling deeper than a simple narration. The simple exposition wouldn't have had, of course, the captivating strength of the contradictory discussion. Lo why I think that the Ghost instilled to the much-loved disciple to choose the diachronic form.

The episode with the Samaritan woman is shown to as being the dialogue of the Lord with the human soul (as it will be presented in *The Following of Christ*), who in the first-place resists but then he obeys and adores His creator.

The Lord wanted His victory not to be an easy one, as self-evident, or mechanical, in an exemplary manner; but free, spontaneous, springing out of conviction preceded by doubts, one totally transforming the believer from Samaria.

In the last analysis the faith act must be like so. The act of faith take place – a thing so well understood by Søren Kierkegaard – when the soul being at prayer doesn't hear himself but the soul hears the Another confessing Himself to the soul: yes, you are not wrong, yea, I Am, I the Living One, I Am Who I Am, and Who is calling you. Come, follow Me. And the soul answers, without hesitation: Amen.

## THE COURAGE

It is to rarely mentioned but still an essential Christian feature. It maybe is, after the theological virtues, the next virtue. Without courage the existence of the Church couldn't be conceived. It was needed, in order the Church to come to existence, the courage of its Founder; in order the Church to last it was needed the courage of His disciples.

We are told about the Lord's gentleness Who is resembled to a gentle and voiceless lamb. This metaphor is justified and emotional. Nonetheless is so that metaphor adopting the image-words: a valiant lion. Who would climb the cross and willingly receive one of the most awful deaths that exist? What nature, if not one of inflexible strength would have been enduring, for three and a half years, serene and calm, the hatred, the perfidy, and the ambushed of the enemy? And what nature could have been standing steadfastly and unscared in front of the ruler and of the synedrium? (In front of one's indifference and of the others' fierce hatred). And what else could be reckoned but an act of daring the departure of the apostles to preach among hostile people, without carrying with them any bag, or staff, or bread, of money? And who among people if not the tough and fearless individuals would have endured really atrocious torments rather than rejecting, even in exchange for the most inviting promises, their faith? It isn't at all inexact form historical point of view, or exaggerated from psychological point of view, to say that the martyrs' blood constitutes the adornment, the purple and the mink of the Church; the martyrs' blood is also the Church's foundation in the strictest and more technical meaning of the world.

The fact that the things are so it is proven not only by the evolutive process of the ecclesiastical institution, but also by itself the Scripture's text which, seemingly foreboding, it underscored this intrinsic and *sine qua non* quality of the Christianity. The Savior and His direct disciples knew only too well and *ab* initio where was dwelling the great mystery of the growing and of the durability of the New Lw. That's why we find countless references - in *Gospels*, and in *Acts*, in *Epistles* – to reckoning the courage as fundamental trait of a Christian.

Martyr means witness, but the synonym of this substantive is: hero. Of course, the disciples confessed their faithfulness, their humbleness, their steadfastness, and their power of suffering. They also confessed their generosity, one worthy of the bravest heroes from the prophane life (military and civilian). You too are some militaries, uttered colonel Chabert, the character of a beautiful novella by Balzac, towards the nuns of the retirement

house where he was accommodated. There is no doubt that to militaries the courage is their specific particularity. The martyrs, anticipating the words of Saint Just, they confirmed much before the French Revolution that saying that the circumstance aren't difficult but to them who hesitate in front of their own tombs. They, the martyrs, they didn't step back; and they even went, and not only once, towards their tombs, without being constricted, full of trust, of gladness, and of assertiveness. To them there weren't difficile circumstances, impossible situations, undefeatable hardships. To them, the phrase by Brice Perain, the French philologist from our century, it seems to have been known: *it is simple, if you want to be free, you must not fear your death*. Lo why the gold, the mink, the purpure, and the adornment of the Church is confounded to the blood from the Cross and to the blood of the martyrs. These ones are matching the most illustrious military victories of the prophane history. From the Holy Ghost and out of this blood has been embodied and has been lasting and it will last forever the Church of Christ.

In the Scripture's texts, the urges to courage of our Lord are numerous.

*Do not fear* He tells (Mk. 5: 36; Lk. 8: 50) to the chief of the synagogue, to Iair, when some people come and announce him about the death of his daughter. *Do not fear, only believe and she will be delivered*. (The faith is, therefore, admitted as a deed of courage, and the declared courage, like the faith too, it is a mystery). Simon was told, likewise: *Do not fear*, for from now on you will be a fisher of people (Lk. 5: 10). To the disciples and to the crowd, likewise: *Do not fear* small flock (Lk. 12: 32). *Do not fear* we find it also in the Apocalypse (1: 17).

The same urge appears also addressed to many individuals: So, *do not fear* (Mt. 10: 26); therefore, *do not fear* (Mt. 10: 31); dare, it is Me, *do not fear* (Mt. 14: 27; Jn. 6: 20): all of those addressed to His Apostles when they got scared seeing Him walking on the sea. At the Transfiguration, after the luminous could had passed, He came closer to Peter, James, and John, and He touched them and told them: get up and *do not fear* (Mt. 17: 7). The angels towards the women who came to the Lord's grave: *Do not fear* (Mt. 28: 5), and the Lord repeats to the same ones: *Do not fear* (Mr. 28: 10). The Lords' angels towards the shepherds: *Do not fear* (Lk. 2: 10), *for, lo, I am heralding you a great joy!* When Jesus shows Himself to the eleven disciples and they get scared because of thinking that they are seeing a ghost (Lk. 24: 36-37) the Lord doesn't utter the same words but His words have similar meaning: *Peace to you* and *why are you disturbed?* ("Let not your heart get troubled, *neither to get scared*" – is written also at John 14: 27). When the scene of walking on te3h

waters is recounted by John (6: 10-20), the words used are similar to those from Matthew: "They got scared; and He told them: It is Me, *do not fear*".

On some other times we meet: *Do not be frightened*. Thus, at Mark 16: 6 (the angels towards the women, in the morning of the Sunday after crucifixion).

The fear is worthy of rebuking and of reproaching: why are you scared, you of little faith? (Mt. 8: 26) are told those form the ship who were scared of the waved covering the ship. Likewise, at Mark 4: 40: *Why are you so fearful?* How comes that you have not faith? Zachariah, the father of the Forerunner, also wanted to receive the heavenly gifts *without fear*, after he wrote the name of the child on the little tablet. The negative forms: *do not fear, do not be scared, let not your heart to be troubled* are often replaced for urges to be courageous: *Dare* son (Mt. 9: 2: towards a man with palsy); *Dare* daughter (Mt. 9: 22; Lk. 8: 48: towards the woman having a bloodshed); *Dare* (Mt. 14: 27; Jn. 10: 33); "You will have troubled in the world, but *dare*. I have overcome the world"; *Dare* (Mk. 6: 50); *Dare*, stand up! (Mk. 10: 49L towards the blind man called Bartimaeus).

Which is the main effect of the fear? The getting far from Christ. The recount from Luke 8: 37 is fully edifying: after Jesus cast out the evil ghost form the demonized man and the pigs throw themselves into the sea, the crowd from the land of the Gadarenes "was engulfed by a big fear". It follows the consequence: "They begged Him to leave their county" (Mt. 8: 34 and Mk. 5-7 say: "They asked Him to pass forward from – to leave – their borders). The causality connection is limpid: they ask Him to leave because they are afraid. The fear, therefore, it brings the breaking up with Christ.

If "don't get troubled" is the equivalent of "do not get scared", because the worry is also a form of the fear, probably Martha was rebuked because of her fear, the Lord knowing that the worry gives birth to feelings and to state of minds stranger to His teaching.

In *Acts* there always appear the same advices: *dare*, *dare Paul*, and he (they) *daring*...

Also, in almost all the *Apostles of Saint Paul*: "That's why we *don't lose our courage*" (2 Cor. 4: 16); *"Daring*, therefore, always" 92 Cor. 5: 6); "Without *getting scared* by anything" (Phil. 1: 28); "for *God hasn't given us the ghost of the fear*" (2 Tim. 1: 7); the fear, therefore, it is from the devil, it is like the sin. It is like the death; this text is capital for it gives us the possibility to understanding the real origine of the fear). The Apostle of the Christians, in the first place, he asks them to dare: "Therefore, brothers, *by having dare*, let's enter the Holy of the Holies, through the blood of Jesus (Hebr. 10: 19). The same Apostle adopts, repeatedly, the most military style and tone as possible:

"in your *fight* with the sin you haven't resisted yet *to the blood*" (Hebr. 12: 4: David, Hanibal, Caesar, Napoleon wouldn't have talked to their soldier differently); *"Fight the good fight* of the faith, *conquer* the eternal life…" (1 Tim. 6: 12); *"Fight*… as a *good soldier* of Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 2: 3).

The text from Ephesians 6: 11 and the following, it is full with words having military nuance: "*strengthen* yourself *into the power*…, put on all your *weapons*…, take your *weapons*…, *defeat* all the troubles…, stand *strong*…, having your waist *girdled*…, putting on your *breast plate*… the *shield* of the faith, put on the *helmet* of your salvation and take the *sword* of the Ghost. One could say that we are leafing up a military regulation book, or that we are reading the battle order of an army captain.

There is in the New Testament an imperative style of the courage, the origin of it being in the commandment given to Abraham: "Get out of your land, out of your nation, and out of the house of your father" (Gen. 12: 1) – and Abraham obeys it, full of courage, despite not knowing where he is going to and where he will stop at, as a good *soldier* as he is (5, and Hebr. 11: 8). The military style of the *Gospels* is manifested by "active" verbs which are urging, imperious, resounding as: persevere, ask, take vigil, watch, wake up, conquer, take heed, be ready, go, search, knock, girdle yourself up.

All of these coming from the part of the Savior and of His Apostles. But the Christian too, having a good dare, he answers in the same manner: "I won't fear!" (Hebr. 13: 6). Why? For he knows two things: firstly, that "the part of the fearful… it is the pond burning with fire and sulfur" (Apoc./ 21: 8). Then, the enumeration of the condemned begins with the fearful, and then continues with the unbelievers, the defiled, the killers, the debauched, the charmers, the worshippers of idols, and finally the liars) – and then, especially because "in love there is no fear, but the consummate love banishes away the fear" (1 Jn. 4: 18). In this way the courage reaches to be, next to the love, the only virtue forever unperishable.

The Lord takes us out form the slavery to the sin and in the same time He sets us free from the tyranny of the fear. He bestows to us two pearls: the freedom and the courage. Being so, the Christian hasn't holier duties that to love and to prove his courage. As ones who are descendants of those who saw Christ embodied, the text from Hebrews 11: 27 is being applied to us too, as reproduced on the statue of Admiral de Coligny, in one of Paris's streets: "He has remained steadfast as one who has seen the unsee emperor". The overwhelming importance granted to the courage by Lord Christ and by the Church comes out form that written at Matthew 11: 12: "the Kingdom of Heavens I taken by rushing and they who strive they get their hand on it". The

heavens, as the popular language sys (also impartial) must be conquered. IN the translation done to the Bible by Radu Vasile and Gala Galaction are used stronger terms and a more direct speaking: the kingdom if taken *by rushing* and they *who rush in get their hand on it*. The French too, they say that the kingdom is *forced* and the *violent ones* are the first to grab it (*s'en emparent)*. Also, old and new versions of the English Bible mention the violence. The verb *to seize* is concordant with the verb *to grab*, or to *laying your hand on*, as Luther interpreted the substantive *Gewalt* doesn't differ in force and violence from the verb *we greisen*, it is fierce, it is expressive, it means almost *to kidnap*.

As conclusion I would ask for your permission to affirm: If the Old Lw could have been summarized in two commandments: Love you God and love your neighbor (Mt. 22: 37; Mk. 12: 30-31; Lk. 10;27), the New Law can be – regarding its operational aspect – summarized thus: have faith, love, and don't be afraid. The fear – an ugly sin in the Lord's eyes; the courage – a virtue pleasant to Him and consubstantial to the situation of being a Christian.

## THE EXAMPLE OF THE MAGI AND THE NON-EXAMPLE OF HEROD

The entire chapter no. 2 from Matthew, verses 1-18, it is proven as being of a stringent actuality, if we read it attentively and with a waken up spirit, as both the Savior and the Apostle of the Gentiles urge us, unmistakingly. Out of this doubtlessly living text – tough recounting us two thousand years old happenings – one should gain two main lessons: one positive and one negative.

The negative text is related to Herod, who was deceived by the three Princes and he avenged himself through an act of savageness and mass extermination, by ordering the killing of all the little children from Bethlehem and from within all its borders, up to the age of two years. The tradition tells us that hoping to kill the Little Child the Herod's soldiers slaughtered fourteen thousands of innocent children. This genocidal act (with certain, woe, resonance into the history of our century) represents the example which the mankind doesn't want to follow to, but to oppose an aversion supersaturated with stubborn and stupid criminality. The behavior of the magi, in exchange, which is an act of non-denunciation, it proposes the good example. Thet don't go to announce Herod, as they were required to do (the reason invoked by Herod was that of going and worshipping the newborn), the Magi refused to play the role as informants and they mind their businesses and turn home, while, the deceived Herod get madly furious and yellow with spite.

The actuality of the *Gospel's* text is, therefore, double. Verily, from newspapers, from radio castings, and from television, we, the people of today, what do we read, hear, and watch? From Asia, from Africa, from America, form the European Occident, from the Near Orient, what do we find out? Mainly deeds worthy of Herod's time. Assassinates, rapes, hijackings of planes and kidnappings of people, takings of hostages, bomb attentats in rail stations, airports, coffeeshops, theaters, restaurants, parks, places for worshipping, and other public places, robberies, hijackings of ships, extermination of populations, persecutions, arsons, famine, tortures. One could say that Herod's world – that of the murders, of the cruelty, of the mercilessness, and of the thirst for blood – has been reborn and it has extended all over the place. Nothing seem to be pleasant to the contemporary individual but killing his fellow human, preferably in torments, to watch him for a long time and with unhidden satisfaction how he suffers in pains, to shed hi blood and, who know, maybe even to drink that one's blood.

The old pleasures of the man from always have reached to be useless in satiating the new lusts. Not the drink not the food, not the wealth, not the

bodily love, not the ambition can claim to be the daily delectation any longer. They have lost their legitimacy, their prestige, their fun. Egotistic, gruesome, bodily, lacking any spiritual value, coarse, but they still were stranger to the dreadful abysses of the collective sadism, and they weren't stained with blood. And they involved only the accountability, the person, and the souly level of the individual committing them. They were framed into the persevering animality of the thinking being, in what the French people call as "the devil's share", they didn't claim rights for intervening and sovereignty upon the committer's fellow humans. Ther were, we could say, modest, they knew what the shame was, they didn't organize their advertisement. They stir up, therefore, some sort of nostalgia.

Together with Herod's world and in good relations with it there stays the world of Judah. This world hasn't been renegaded by the Magi. What King Herod asked the Magi for? What meant that information which was to be shared to Herod at their turning back home? Nothing else but a denunciation. As the thirst for blood too, and as the delectation into deeds of torture too, the denunciation is a characteristic of our times. And what an awful and wicked act that is! We can notice again a rift between the old human sins and the spreading of this new plague. This is because the theft, the drunkenness, the greediness, the debauchery, the violence, or even the murder out of passion, they fade away in the presence of the denunciation, of this sin without risks, unconditioned by courage and never accompanied by mitigating circumstances. The world of Herod and the world of Judah complete on one another wonderfully, and they compose a painting of a ferocity and of an abjection which not even the acutest forms of the old human sins – regardless how dirty, how monotonous, hos disgusting and, actually, how ridicule and vain – cannot even partially contend.

The denunciation is a sin graver than any other sins, because of three decisive reasons:

1. It is a sin against the Holy Ghost, for within each human being there is divine breath. Tos our proto-parent Adam, God gave breath of life out of itself His breath, face to face. Denouncing your fellow human means selling godlike ghost and it is a shouting-at-heavens sin, just like Judah's sin.

The denunciation plucked off through torture cannot be, of course, reckoned as a sin. But the denunciation done in cold blood, the oral or written denunciation, the denunciation done at your own initiative and in full liberty of your will, it is the most abject, the most undignified, the wickedest, the most gruesome, and the most worthless of any existing sins. Maybe this insistence of

mine could be reckoned as exaggerated and that such a torrent of insulting and hating words seem inappropriate as written by a monk. Wouldn't be more appropriate a more temperate language, less violent epithets, and not so much insistence, and a more temperate attitude? I am answering, without hesitation, that if I had more trivial adjectives, more infamous, more gruesome, wickeder adjectives, I wouldn't avoid using them, and I am sorry for having such a poor vocabulary in expressing my horror and my disgust and for qualifying the sin I am talking about according to the holy justice;

2. The denunciation, an act of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost and an act of defiling the divine spark dwelling in any creature of God, selling of innocent blood and getting comrades with Judah, it is, secondly, a *gratuitous sin*. The old and too old human sins had their explanation: the satisfaction of a passion: the greediness, the debauchery, the desire for glory, the love for money... But the denunciation is a gratuitous act. Excepting some rare cases which the denouncer is paid in, with cash or with other advantages, the denunciation doesn't bring any direct profit to its committer. The seller acts – as some characters of the books of Andre Gide – without motivation, out of *pure devilish pleasure*, and only out of the urge to commit the evil and to stick his neighbors into trouble, misfortune, and disasters;

3. From this point of view the denunciation is identified to the pleasure, to the sole pleasure which the devils are partakers to in hell. This is for we better know that the devils too don't live differently than the condemned ones, but they too live in the content and in the stench of the hell, and not in some other place. That's why, probably, they prefer to wander around the earth, and that's why, I think, they beg the Lord, in the Gergesenes' country, not to send them back to deep (namely into hell, their dwelling place), but wherever he wanted, be if even a herd of pigs (Mt. 8: 31; Mk. 5: 12; Lk. 8: 31-32). That's why they resist so much leaving the demonized ones' bodies, writhing and shouting out with a loud voice. That's why if one finds a clean house, swept and adorned, he hurries up to call other seven ghosts to dwell together with him (Lk. 11: 26). The devils, like the wardens of a prison breath the same infected air as the inmates do, they see the same petty show, they walk into the same darkness, they see the same hideous things. No other fragrance delights their nostrils but the same hell's stench, no other sounds comfort their ears but the moans, the cries, the whining, and the curses of the tormented ones. And, then, what comforting they have, what fun? How do the wicked they differ from the misfortunates entrusted to their mercilessness? There is only one

difference, the consolation: the possibility of overpouring their anger, their disgust, and their grief upon those whom they discretionary master on; they keep pouring some tar bucket in the boiling caldron, they prick deeper the spike into the flesh, they stir up the fire, the tis the rope more tightly, they multiply their mockery, their shamelessness, their humiliations. This is their vent, the unique mode of cooling themselves down and to appease, to some extent, their trouble and inward wound.

The joy of the denouncer isn't of another sort, and his comforting isn't priding out of other regions of the psyche. The denouncer is identified to the devils, not discovering other vent to the evilness smoldering within himself than doing the evil.

The Christian can easily deduce form the text from Mattew 2: 1-18 that it is appropriate to them to be revolted, disgusted, and rejecting any deeds of savageness and of cruelty of the same sort with that committed by Herod and, equally, to be attracted by the model offered by the Magi that is the exact opposite of Juda's deed.

We, the usual people, we don't' have gold or myrrh or incense to bring as gifts to Christ. But if we don't have gold or precious stones of expensive spices, that don't' mean that we have nothing to bring Him, at our turn. We can, for instance, feel horrified by cruelty, by homicide, by hatred, by persecution, by savageness. We can refuse to follow Judah's example, by conceiving the selling of our fellow human as not a less grave sin that blaspheming God's name of as betraying the Savior.

The world of Herod and the world of Judah, of the cruelty and of the worthlessness, let both of them be foreign, stranger, and non-understood to us. Let's not search for our joy on the wicked realms of the gratuitous evilness and in imitating the devils whose sole balsam is the writhing in torments of the damned ones.

Let's strive, in other words, to provide actuality to the *Gospel*'s text which we have analyzed: by following the beautiful example of the Magi, to the by resisting (as much as we can with our weak powers) the horrifying example of Herod. Let's allow ourselves be contaminated by any act of courage, cleanness, and benevolence, regardless how weak that would be.

## SAINT ANTHONY THE GREAT

"*For many times they fought me, from my youth, and they haven't defeat me".*
(Psalm 128[19]: 2)

The feast from today doesn't celebrate the Blessed Anton of Padova, the Portuguese man who lived in Italy during the XIII Century, the Franciscan usually depicted in icons as holding his arms Jesus or a lily, well know also to us and celebrated on thirteenth of June, but we celebrate us his homonym, Antony the Great, the Egyptian who lives between the third and fourth centuries, whom we know about that he lives for one hundred and five years.

This Anthony, originating from a noble and wealthy family, he was orphan from a young age. He shared his wealth to the poor and he practiced the ascesis, first in his particular hermitage; he lived alone during monastic life right in his village of birth. *The Lives of the saints* tell us that later on he withdrew himself into wilderness ("running away from the darkness of the Egypt"), and that withdrawal was followed by another into the deeper and uninhabited desert and then, to a place called by the hagiographic text as "the mountain". Here he fulfilled his mission as founder of the first monasteries, his name being mentioned, together with those of Pachomius, of Paul of Thebe, of Amun, of Pimen, among the founders of the monastic life whose rules followed to be established, ulteriorly, by Saint Basil the Great in Cappadocia.

Anthony is universally known for his big fights against the devils and against the great temptations which he was steadfastly submitted to, by the devils. The devils hated him and persecuted him with a ferocity that honors him. They tormented him with the temptations of the debauchery, with beatings, with devilish noises, and with all sorts of hallucinations sent upon him. They tried to lure him with the gold and silver, but vainly. The hallucinations with wild beasts (the most diverse and frightening triggering the imagination of many painters and writers, especially of Gustave Flaubert in his famous *Temptation of Saint Anthony*) didn't prove, at their turn, to be useful to the devils. The upheaval, the noise, the roar seemed to the devils as being trustful weapons against the improved monk, whose zeal towards achieving his consummation irritated them a lot; none of them reached their target.

[19] In KJB we have: Ps. 129: 2. (E. l. t.'s n.)

All of those, the ascetic defamed and torn down as some garbage and some wickedness, but not without difficulty and heavy fights. Out of this war lasting for decades, against the relentless and hating devils, Anthony turned out as fully victorious. He defeated the devils, reaching to discuss with their chief, in a mode analogue to that of one who, at the end of an investigation hold his spirit and he couldn't have been scared and forced to make confessions against himself and against his friends, and the investigator officer talks "freely" to the undefeated defendant.

Out of Saint Anthony the Great's life, as it is recounted, one owes to extract two lessons of most stringent important to any Christian, whether monk or simple layman. The first important lesson: through fight and resistance one can ascertain that all the big temptations, despite their tragical and irremediable character which satan tries to dress them up in, and despite the virulence satan succeed in providing those temptations with, they aren't but smoke, delusions, steams, and illusions[20].

This thing was very well understood by two of the most important Christian artists of our century: the Italian director Federico Fellini and the Catalan painter Salvador Dali. The first one, in the film *Giulietta degli spirity* (1965), he unmasked mercilessly, definitively, and at the most pregnant aesthetical manner that all the so-called almighty ghosts rushing upon the poor frightened Giulietta were actually simple phantasmagories, imaginings, and psychological residues. The imposing ship appearing to come and enslave her spirit and her mind – forever – it isn't but a pile of garbage made of rags, a castle made of play cards, some garbage painted in malefic black and red colors. Only the victim's fear transforms those in a real danger. Giulietta is healed in the very moment which that fortress is torn apart by waves and it decomposes in its constitutive parts: rags, patches and so on.

The second artist denouncing the demonic tricks, the great painter Salvador Dali, he presented the temptations and the works of satan as some huge elephants advancing in a line upon Saint Anthony who seeks for refuge in a corner of the painting. Anthony is very small and the elephants are huge. But Anthony still keeps in his raised right hand a trustful (and working) weapon: the cross, and the dreadful animals have their bodies supported by some long and thin insect-like feet! What does this anatomical construction mean, this figurative trick, this catastrophic disproportion painted by the so profoundly Christian and illustrious artis? Nothing else but the fact that the temptations

[20] Why then, it is so difficult to us to defeat the temptations? It might be because here is applied the formula conceptualized by Simone Weil: we are attracted by unreal forces and things, but the chains tying us to them are real.

and the lures of the enemy are simple illusion lacking any concreteness, ground, and graveness (in both senses: moral and mechanical): simple deductions of the imagination, simple scenography, simple directorial tricks! The elephants with filiform insect-like legs, lo what they really are, lo what the victorious Saint Anthony the Great demonstrates to us about the temptations' ultimate nature. The tragical character of the temptations – be it of the bodily or spiritual beings – so strongly and impressively underscored by writers and psychoanalysts – Racine, Goethe in *Faust*), Freud, Schnitzler, Wedekind, Baudelaire, Proust (or, Romanians: Macedonski, Gid Mihaescu, Panait Istrati, Mircea Streinu) -, Dali and Fellini transform it in smoke, in dust, and in optic-cerebral illusion. They pluck off the romantic, solemn, and haughty coat of Mephisto, and by shaking off it its magical and expressionist sparks, they unfold it and they show it to us in its miserable old reality as a broken coat of a wandering illusionist dwelling wherever he finds a place to stay.

This is one of the immortal merits of monk Anthony. And him, after long and bitter wars, he succeeded in pricking the smoke curtain of the diabolical plots and to scatter it. He plucked off their aura, their prestige, and their terror. Fellini and Salvador Dali, in our time, they haven't done but to follow and present Anthony's life in painting and in cinematographic art.

The second very precious lesson of the Egyptian hermit is that the true monk or the authentic Christian layman cannot ever be upset, sour, frown, hangover. *The Lives of the Saints* tell us about the ones whom we are venerating today with admiration, that "he wasn't like one grown up in the mountain and who became old there, having wild behavior, but he was glad, gentle, and polite".

*Glad, gentle, polite*: these ones are the traits the Christian monk owes to prove, and let him be as little as possible frown, upset, or stubborn. The rude, the upset, the always-in-a-hurry one, the fierce Christian monk isn't either Christian or monk. It is contraband stuff, counterfeit, false money. Saint Seraphim of Sarov, an exemplary monk and an authentic Christian, how are we told that he was? Ceaselessly glad, peaceful, full of amiability and courtesy. He was receiving his guests with benevolence, he was saluting them friendly, he was calling them "my joy". Nothing harsh, nothing fierce, nothing rejecting in his relationships with the people. Only to himself, in the loneliness and in the intimacy of his hermit life, he proved to be harsh and unforgiving – with himself, never with others!

The monk tries to supervise himself also in his speaking, also by taking Saint Anthony as role-model. We are also told that: he had his word sweetened with the godlike salt". What could we deduce out of here? That if we see a man,

be him even a rigorous and a great ascetic, but we find him coarse, rude, upset, we will know that he surely isn't an honest ascetic, and that he is Christian only by name, that he is a hypocrite and an inappropriate actor in the role he dares to play.

Yes, Saint Anthony can be to us, on any moment of our life, a role-model of strength in our fight against the devils whom he not only defeated unconditionally, but he also shattered away their main tricks and so he proved the illusionary character of the big temptations which they preferably resort to in the war they wage against the poor mortals. What has remained out of the "tragic" and fierceness yielded by the implacable deity Libido, or out of the fears and darkness stirred up by the deity Pan? Only a little something, *following to the unveilings* of Anthony, which are enough for questioning the whole Freudian literature and its fatality.

Then Anthony remains a teacher of good and decent Christian and monastic behavior, by teaching all of us – laymen and monks – to strive and constraint (if needed) ourselves to be kind, gentle, amiable, lenient, glad, calm with our neighbor, always and regardless how much we are disturbed and troubled within our being. Let one not know our battle which we are fighting within ourselves! Let's take heed at the life of Saint Anthony, that the real monk cannot be know after the length of his bear, or after his physical filthiness or of his vestments or of his monastic cell. Not washing yourself can be a personal ascesis (questionable, of course, as also tying yourself with a chain to a wall - that ascetic was rebuked by Bishop Meletius of Antioch: we don't tie ourselves to Christ with chains but with our love and with the grace of God), but it never can be claimed as a principle or as an example to be followed. Neither the fierce, piercing gazes, nor the frowning and the sourness, neither the mandatory nasal singing, nor the mumbling of the words (so that nobody could understand anything and in the ears of the listeners to be imprinted only the haughty nasal modulations of the singer who is convinced that only him is worthy of serving God and to terrorize his brothers with the monopoly he has upon some solfeggio he decrees on his own as the only one acceptable), neither the literal fanaticism inspired by the very Pharisaism (edifier in this sense being the case of our "holy calendar": it reduced to its true proportions the deceit or the incommensurable stylistic naiveness[21]) and the

[21] The Calendar, as Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa ascertains (in *Clarification Word Related to the Straying the Stylists*, Bucharest, 1955), it is but a simple tool, as the clock is too, it is used for a periodical division of the time. A tool for preserving the cleanness is the broom. Can we talk about "our holy broom"? Archimandrite Paul Lecca, the abbot of Arnota Monastery, he recounted me the followings: a monk insisted very much not to be modified the vocabulary of the *Book of Psalms*, and he asked that monk: does your piousness understand what is written in the

ugly habit to ostentatiously refer yourself to the practices asceses (for instance: the fasting; a Christina and more stronger a monk are forbitten to say that they are fasting; it is better than that, as we are advised by the Paterikon, us to eat meat for three times a day); neither the harshness for one another or the thunders and the lightenings form above as from a Jupiter *fonans* and *pluvius* and neither, by and large, the "standing out" attitude do not belong to what it is and to what it ought to be specific to the monastic life. Christ wanted any Christian to be Joyful, gentle, humble *discrete*, and the monks – doubtlessly – they need to prove, to a superior degree of intensity, that they possess the gifts expressed by these adjectives.

It is in the teachings of that old man from yore, a message which doesn't' take heed at time or space. From the deep of the Egyptian wilderness, over tens of centuries, he talks to us about very actual things. What he is transmitting to us regarding the war against the devils or referring to the correct behavior of the unhypocritical monk, it finds a strong echo within our hearts, because the devilish temptations and the traps of the living in a community, they have changed very little. Only if we have ears to hear and mind to understand and will to apply!

old version of the *Book of Psalms*? – That monk answered him: yes! Then tell me what the word *miscoi* means. The monk answered him: I reckon it is a big fly. And the archimandrite told him: It actually is a mule or a horse.

## REJECTING ON CHRIST

### - teaching word, as it was uttered in the church of the Rohia Monastery on the first Sunday after the descent of the Holy Ghost (1987) -

As I usually do, and according to my nature, I am now too going to talk to you openly and plainly. And this is all the more as the *Gospel*'s text of today isn't composed with amiable, comforting, and shy words, but it was written with tough and open words.

I reckon that we better read anew, together, the *Gospel*'s text from Mattew, chapter no. 10, verses 32-33 and 37-39:

"Anyone who confesses for Me in front of the people, I too will confess for him in front of My Father Who is in heavens.

And he who rejects Me in front of the people, I too will reject him in front of My Father Who is in heavens.

He who loves his father or his mother more than he loves Me, he is not worthy of Me; he who loves his son of his daughter more than he loves Me, he is not worthy of Me.

And he who doesn't get his cross to follow Me, he is not worthy of Me.

He who values his soul he will lose his soul, and he who loses his soul for Me, he will find his soul".

To this text we are going to add another, one that hasn't been read to you during the *Holy Liturgy*, but it completes and it is in direct connection with the read text. Let's read this text too, as it in is *The Gospel according to Saint Apostle Luke* 14: 26:

"If somebody comes to Me and he doesn't hate his father and his mother and his wife and his children and his brothers and his sisters, and even his soul himself, he cannot be My disciple".

And the verse no. 21 almost repeats the verse no. 38 from the chapter no. 10 of *The Gospel according to Matthew*:

"And he who doesn't carry his cross and who doesn't come after Me, he cannot be My disciple".

Strange and frightening words, brother Christians, strange and frightening words!

How comes, the kind and gentle and merciful Lord Christ, the Lord Who always preached to us the love, Who is God-the-Love Himself, and Whose teaching give the love as a pivotal point of the World and essence of the faith, suddenly and in the most unexpected manner He preaches us the hatred, He

urges us to hate and to bear enmity.? And on whom? On wife, on children, on parents, of brothers, on sisters, our house, our soul, on ourselves?

I am finding it hard to believe that the God of the love could have wanted us to be enemies to one another. I think that the *Gospel*'s text from today mustn't be understood only according to what it seemingly preaches to us, in other words not according to its strictly literal aspect. I think it must be interpreted and understood in depth.

And the deep and builder meaning I suspect it to be in accordance to the Christian teaching: we owe to love our wife, our brothers, our sisters, our children, our parents, our house. Yes, to love them. We owe even not to hate ourselves either (only the sin dwelling within us). But – and I am repeating this adverb *but*: when needed, in grave and decisive moments of the life, when all of us are required to openly admit what we are and what we believe in, they all – the wife, the children, the father, the mother, the sisters, and so on – the must not be an impediment for us *confessing Christ with a strong and loud voice*.

Some people say: what do you want? What can I do? What do you want me to do? I have a wife, I have small children, I have old parents, I have a little house, I have some goods, I am a little well off, what do you want from me, I cannot do anything! Willy-nilly I am rejecting Christ, even at least formally and only in words.

This isn't a Hristian reasoning. The true Christian reasoning, according to the *Gospel*'s text and faithful both to the Christian freedom and to its spirit is: *although* I have a wife, children and so on, *despite* I have a wife, children and so on, I still don't reject Christ, I am confessing Him. I don't love in this world anything more than Christ, I don't care in this world for anything more than I do for Christ. My wife, my children and so on, they are not an impediment to me in confessing Christ. I love my family, I love my relatives, my being, but I am establishing a hierarchy: I place Christ in the first place, and for the love I have for my people I don't want to provide them with a bad example, so that they not to be ashamed of me.

Some people say: I don't reject Christ, I love Christ, I confess Christ, I worship Christ, but I do that within my heart and within my soul, inside myself, in the hidden of my intimate person. With my mouth, with a loud voice, I am embarrassed of doing it. But, so what? This won't weigh much on the scales. Isn't it actually essential what we do believe, what we confess within ourselves, in the deep of our spiritual being? The words are only sounds and appearances, frail and superficial compositions, they fly away, they are lost into temporality.

Neither this reasoning is Chrisian. Take heed: it isn't enough the inner faith, it isn't enough the love non-confesses outwardly, regardless hos sincere that love would be, regardless hos hot. It is a hypocritical love. How comes that, once it is a sincere love, and it even is a hot love, it still is a hypocritical love? It is hypocritical because of not exposing itself, it is a half love: it is only an inward love, it is a skimped love. Hypocritical is also that love manifested only exteriorly, halved, incomplete; unclean love is also that love hiding within, hiding in a den and fearing the light. The fact that it is so, that I am right, it results from itself the text of the *Holy Scripture*. I am referring here to the *Epistle towards Roman of Saint Apostle Paul* (10: 10):

"This is for one believed with his heart towards justice, and with the mouth one confesses towards salvation".

Listen to me! Out of heart inward confession is good for our spiritual progress, but for salvation one necessarily needs a confession done with the mouth, with the word. There is not enough the love of the faith from within heart, we also need the courage for confessing Christ with our mouth, regardless the risks.

A great contemporary Russian writer tells us that when we are in trouble, in a big danger, in a limit-situation (as the literate language expresses it), in danger of betraying even on ourselves and of committing act or of saying words which we later will repent very sourly for, in such moments there is a sole efficient and unmistaken solution: let us reckon ourselves dead!

If we reckoned ourselves dead, there would be no danger lurking for us. Nothing would scare us any longer, nothing would alure us, and we would pay attention to nothing but to our faith: we are just dead! Wha could temp us anymore?

Ah! says the same great writer, I can shout out: it is such a pity for my youth (or woe to my old age), it is pity for the books I won't ever read, it is pity for the strolling I won't ever take, it is pity of the music I won't ever listen to, of the foods I won't eat, of the drink I won't drink, it is pity of all the beauties and wonders of this world which I won't see anymore, but there is no other way for me: it is better to me to die together with Christ than to deny Him.

Nothing can be put in balance with Christ: neither the wife, nor the children, neither the parents, nor the relatives, neither the house, nor the material goods, neither the personal status, nor even the life. When it comes about Christ one must confess Him by the closest and dearest to us creatures; namely Christ must be confessed with the word, with the mouth.

With the word, with the mouth.

But why is that? How comes, some people can object to this, that the words are so important? The little words, the formulas, *the empty words*? Do those have such a great importance? Is it appropriate us to grant them the preeminence?

I am answering that: yes, they are important, yes, their importance is overwhelming. "Word's power is like in fairytales" says Alexandru Vlahuta, the poet. There isn't enough for you to believe only with your heart. We are required a public statement. There are not discussed only some words and formulas, some chatty words. The confession with a loud voice is something else: it is the same with adopting an attitude, adopting a stance, proving our inward being, our exposition and unveiling, one showing who we are, whose side we have taken on, where we are, which are our true colors, what we do on this earth, what is the meaning of our presence within world, and how we define on ourselves.

We cannot be both with God and with Mamon. If necessary, we must know – if we really belong to Christ – to accept the suffering, the poverty, the trouble, the cross, and even our death.

Our death!

Well, in our century and in the contemporary society there is not so much about death. The matter is not put in such categorical terms. Yore, yes, when the Roman emperors were persecuting the Christians, there was the danger of the apostasy, namely of the public and solemn rejection of Christ, the Christians being asked, under the threat of the death and of the most dreadful torments, to reject Christ and to go and worship the idols.

Nowadays the things are no longer such. The Christians are no longer menaced with the death and with the torments, they are no longer required solemn acts of apostasy and of publicly rejecting Christ. That would urge us thinking that today there is no longer such a thing as rejection of Christ. But there still are indirect rejections of Christ, and no less real than the apostasy from yore. We reject Christ by adhering to an atheistic doctrine, by participating to atheistic assemblies, by consenting in any way to an atheistic movement. Of by feeling shame of and avoiding to mark on ourselves with the sigh of the Holy Cross, by feeling shamed and by avoiding to be seen entering a church or uttering those words or making those gestures which could unveil us a being Christians.

When we are asked for a rejection of Christ, be it even and indirect and well camouflaged rejection, then, yes, it is well to hate on ourselves, us to hate our family and our material goods. Let's then confess Christ at any cost. This is the exam, this is the test, this is the Final Judgment on earth.

"You still haven't resisted yet all the way to the blood" says the Apostle of the Gentiles, and we shun the troubles, the unpleasant things and situations, some sufferings, the world's opinion on us, the small losses.

But Christ requires us our courage, our firmness, our steadfastness, the power for looking at the Cross.

Yes, brother Christians, this is with Christ like. It is on life and death, it is not a play, it is not a joke, it is not with half-measures, it is not a hide and seek game, it is not with "actually…", it is not with "what could I do…", it is not with "the circumstances forced me…" …

Christ is kind, gentle, merciful, comforting, and sweet. But he isn't only that. He is one with Him Who willingly climbed the Cross and Who shed His blood for us and Who dies in awful torments. Christ is king, gentle, merciful, comforting, and sweet, but He is *terrible* too, He is Him Who didn't hesitate to allow Himself to be crucified. He requires us to be very serious regarding our situations as Christians. We cannot play Christ out. We can lie to the people, we can deceive them, we can alure them, and we can talk them out. But if we reject and get ashamed of Christ, He too will reject and get ashamed of us at the Final Judgment.

There is, brothers Christians, a dreadful image, and I am asking for your permission to evoke it in front of you. I am confessing you that this image sometimes haunts me and it dreads me. Behold it: Christ sits on the judgment chair on the Dooms Day, on His impartial throne, and all the people come in front of Him. And He divides them in two groups: to the right and to the left, the sheep and the goats. He Blesses the ones from His right hand and sends them to Paradise, there where the eternal happiness is. And on the ones form his felt hand, the cursed ones, He sends them into the Gehenna of the fire, there where the weeping and the gnashing of the teeth are.

But there is one more group!

It is that group of the ones whom, before sending them into hell, the Lord feels disgusted of them, he feels sick of them, He doesn't even want to see them, to look at them: and when they are come in front of Him, He is raising His right hand and he covers His eyes with his palm. Because of how much He is disgusted of them. He isn't even looking at them!

(You could possibly tell me: but the lord is Ghost! How can be there about raising His arm and covering His eyes? Yes, the Lord is Ghost, but because of our weakness, we, in our holy icons, we imagine the heavenly powers as having a human countenance. And Jesus ascended with His body to Heavens, and in some icons, He is presented sitting on the right hand of the Father and keeping the Cross next to Him, as a memory of His worldly, bodily

sufferings. So that I think that isn't a heresy or a mistake mentioning the covering of His eyes with His palm).

On those who have rejected Him, on the blasphemers of the Holy Ghost, on the friend and followers and believers of Judah (namely the traitors, the informants) He sends them there where they will belong, without not founding them worthy even of a His harshest look.

This image obsesses me and I am confessing you that I often pray myself to God in order Him not to be like that to me when I will come to Judgment. Let's all of us pray fierily, for Him not to be like that to us. May Him not raise His arm for covering His eyes, in order not to be Him forced to look at us. May us not be partakers to this supreme rejection and to this fearsome shame. May it not be like that to us!

# III.
# Generation Haec Signum Quaerit
# - The Tragedy of Judah –

## THE TRUST

*From "credere Deum est"*
*To "credere in Deum"*

The *Gospel*'s text, bot at Matthew (8: 22-35), at Mark (4: 36-41), and at Luke (8: 23-27) uses the word faith (*how comes that you don't' have faith?* Or *where is your faith?* Or again *you of a little faith*), but in the pericope of the appeasing of the storm on the sea I for one reckon that using the term *trust* id more appropriate. The Lord rebukes His disciples for two reasons: because they are fearful and because they lack their faith. One couldn't say that the disciples are really fearful, because the peril was real and imminent (I reckon that the qualificative "fearful" rather describes them who are disturbed and bewildered by the simple eventuality of a threat); all three pericopes tell us about such a big storm that the waves were covering the ship (and the ship was about to get filled up with water), or that the ship was already taking in water, so that the disciples were really in danger; in such cases of real and imminent danger maybe the it would be more appropriate to use the expression: legitimate alarm. And likewise, instead of faith it would have been more opportune to use the word *trust*. I think the *trust* was what the disciples missed. They didn't base themselves on the actuality of the Teacher's presence on board of their ship, they didn't believe their feeling, their intuition, their conviction that nothing evil could happen to them as long as they were under the immediate protection of Christ. One still cane see – I am admitting that – also the properly-said disbelieve, as they would have forgotten Who their companion was. They had forgotten about that, of course, because all of them wondered why the wind ceased and why the sea got appeased, and they ask one another: Who could be This One Who commands, and the wind and the sea obey Him?

The motions and the state-of-mind experienced by the disciples who were in that ship assaulted by waves aren't specific top the earthly life of the Savior. They have their equivalent in diverse circumstances of the prophane history, where, in the same way, the mistrust is being proven. When Caesar crosses from Galia into Britain and a strong storm is unleashed on the water between the two countries, his companions too are engulfed by panic. Caesar rebukes them: don't you know who is with you? Don't you understand that nothing really bad has power upon you as long as you are with Caesar? (He doesn't say: with me, he objectified himself at the third person, - as in *De bello gallico*, he seems detaching from his self). Baltazar Gráian, in *Criticon*, he notices: "Even

the dangers fear of and respect the important personalities: sometimes the death doesn't dare to face them, and their fate matches their nature" (translation by Sorin Marculescu, *Criticonul*, Universe Publishing House, 1987, p. 47). Gracián too quotes Caesar's "tempests" and he says: the adders forgave Hercules, the steals on Alexander Macedon, the bullet's on Carol Quintus. One could say that the disasters, the dangers, the killing weapons don't touch them, they don't have free access upon certain people, as long as these people haven't fulfilled yet the task appointed to them, as long as they *haven't conveyed their message*. Caesar on the British Channel seems to have the information that he hasn't played his role entirely yet, namely that he hasn't provided the world with the message sown by History into his though and mind.

The same peace at Christ on Tiberias Sea, during that storm: he knows to well that *his hour hasn't come yet*. That's why He sleeps peacefully, that's why He blames His disciples (though maybe in a hurry) and He rebukes them because of not having faith. Verily, when you are in a certain dangerous circumstance with That One Whom you have bestowed al your love power and all your discernment power, you are not allowed to worry anymore, neither to doubt yourself, or to cogitate that the lots are bad and you are going to die.

The has something of the dramatism of a painting by Géricault or Delacroix: the night is dark and evil, the sky is covered, the waves are huge, the wind blows mercilessly, the small boat trembles and hesitates between life and abyss. Christ is at the front end of the boat, He sleeps carelessly, fac from the fierceness of the reality. The disciples strive, they don't know what else to do – though they are, some of them, fishermen, accustomed to the sea – but to wake their Teacher out of His sleep. And they seem to dare reproaching Him: we are going to die all of us and He is sleeping!

The editors and the commentators of the *Gospel*'s text hint to the Old Testament where it is mentioned the power of the divinity upon storms. So, for instance: Ps. 88: 10[22]: "You master the sea's power and You appease the movement of the waves"; Ps. 106: 29[23]: "And He commanded to the storm and it got appeased and the sea's waves went silent"; Job 26: 12: "With His power He cleaved the sea and with His wisdom He shattered its fury".

But in the episode of the appeasing of the storm by Christ, there is a second and deeper meaning: it is unveiled here itself the mystery of the relationship between the human creature and their Savior, and even the

[22] In KJB we have: Ps. 89: 9. (E. l. t.'s n.)
[23] In KJB we have: Ps. 107: 29. (E. l. t.'s n.)

problem of the man's capacity of *fully* trusting and trusting *in an absolute manner*, without even the tiniest doubt or worry, The One Whom they accepted as Guide and Teacher. The Ghost, yes, it is zealous and ready to believe, to trust; the body, though, or the intermediary areas between flesh and spirit, the inferior areas of the vegetative soul, are much more instable, more open to the ancestral fears and to the doubts of the skepticism that dwells even into the deps of the sincerest enthusiasm. The Apostles, in this circumstance, they prove to be men – if I may say so – in the whole *weakness* of the word. They followed Christ, they accompany Him, they love Him, but after all, when facing a real and peremptory danger, when they are menaced by the danger from such a closeness and so furiously and menacing and implacably and visibly and *really* – everything that is superior, hot, *ideal* within themselves, it starts wobbling, it get broken, and in the end it gives the place to fear and especially to *mistrust*, to the impossibility of perceiving the voice telling them: do not fear! Here is a power greater than that of these waves and that power protects you. The Apostles, when facing the storm, they reenter the ranks of the people who know only what they see or what they hear or what they feel, who know only *the unmediated data* of the sensitiveness informed by instincts, by reflexes, and by tropisms; grave – and probably that's why Christ rebukes them harshly – it is the fact that the Apostles are the ones sleeping because of not realizing Who is their Companion for thar travel, so that they fear an inferior world and they cannot understand that the matter is subordinated to the Ghost.

When Dostoyevsky wrote: being I on my death bed and somebody coming to prove me that the truth is something else, I will remain with Christ and I won't part with the truth' here he expressed a state of mind opposite to that which temporarily fell into the small herd of Christ. In the presence of the life's waves, of its multiple storms and temptations and traps and avalanches, and noises and furies, the Christian owed to choose Christ – regardless how big and fierce and incontestable the tumult. (The storm fi the reality, but the Truth is Christ). Trusting the unseen One, not obeying the haughty requests and the black fears contrived by a clever scenario, which actually is superficial, apparent, short-lasted, namely it is a passing wave. Of course, the noise is great and the reality proves to have become only hostility and noise and rushing in, one could say that the gates have been unlocked, there is no longer escape, there can no longer come help from anywhere, the Kafkian ghosts seem to have started from all quarters; yes, the waves can cover on any moment the small, helpless boat of the human life. Still saying: no; repeating (as Andrew Suarès advices us to) the Neptun's word towards the unchained waves: no, no, no; considering as *maya* (as the Hindu say) – namely illusion, delusion,

scenography – the whole that scenery striving to convey the impression of ineluctability and irremediable: *lo the art of being a Christian*: trusting Christ even when in danger, not only on feasting days, when the sky is clear of a little cloudy, when the background noise of the reality hasn't become a sonorous orgy, and the natural elements haven't started griming upon us as the forest from Birnam against the unfortunate King Machbeth.

It is not enough we to believe in Christ and in His godhead. We are required also the human feeling, one less theological, one *more intimate*, more direct, warmer, closer to a me-you relationship (Martin Buber), of person-to-person (Dumitru Stăniloae), of the *trust* of every moment, in all the diverse (small of decisive) vicissitudes of the life. It is clear that there is a difference – despite being only a nuance, the equivalent of a semitone – between *faith* and *trust*. They who were on the ship menaced by the anger of the waves, they especially lacked their *trust*. The *trust* has as foundation entities which are less abstract and less towering than the faith is: some sort of naiveness, a childish impulse of the heart, a refusal of taking seriously the hideousness of and the persecutions from the inanimate world, a total entrustment of the self that surrenders (unconditionally) to his protector: the guardian angel, the Good God, the Merciful Christ, the most beloved Saint. To the power know only to Him. The *trust* is like a direct phone-call, a selective wave length tying the soul to the object of his undenied, doubtless, non-ironical love of His. Thew *trust* creates something similar to a defense wall that cannot be penetrated by the various and complicated tricks and cunningness and subterfuges – sometimes fearsome, gloomy, dreadful – of the diabolical sarcasm determined to tear down everything that is clean, candid, and courageous within the soul that is, in the same time, both grown up and childish, of the thinking being. *I believe in Christ and I trust Him* is the complete statement of the Christian. The Christian knows that on that ship which he crosses the life's sea in, that on that ship that can anytime sink, he isn't alone, and that somewhere in the hiding places and in the shadows of it, there is – together traveling – Christ. And that's bestows the Christian with a calmness, with a power of enduring, with a power of self-control which can be exposed to very hard trials, but they cannot be annihilated or transformed into despair, chaos, straying.

If *forced and pressured upon*, I should define precisely the difference between *trust* and *faith* I would dare to enunciate – refering myself to Hölderlin and Heidegger – that the trust it appears sometimes as a *poetical power* of the human spirit, while the faith is the soul's pneumatic faculty. And regarding those moments of doubt, of fear, of hesitation which the Lord's discples crossed through, they teach us how to be humble (they show us how frail all of us are)

and in the same time they remind us these full of grace words of Dostoyevsky: “In order to judge the moral force of a people (o. n.: of a man, of some people too) and what that people is able to do with it in the future, one shouldn’t take in consideration the degree of wickedness which that people happened to have fallen to on a given moment; one should take in consideration only the degree of spirituality which that people can reach when the moment will come”.

The Apostles, those hesitant and fearful from on the sea of Gennesaret, those *piously-frail figures* (as Goether would say, in the translation of Stefan Augustin Doinas) are the steadfast and the valiant martyrs and the confessors from later on, of Christ-the-Victorious.

## THE VERB *TO BELIEVE*

*"Jesus told him: For you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who didn't see but they still believed!"*
John 20: 29

When the hierarchs and the scribes, passing by the Crucified, on Golgotha, they were shaking they heads and said: *He saved others, but He cannot save on Himself; Christ, the emperor of Israel, let Him descend from the cross for us to see and to believe in Him*, they were committing, of course, a blasphemy. But they committed also an error of linguistic order. The entire scene is briefly presented in the *Gospel according to Luke* (23: 25) and in details in the *Gospel according to Matthew* (27: 31 and the followings) and in the *Gospel according to Mark* (15: 29 and the followings), this scene transmits to the reader a profoundly realistic and authentic shiver. All the details prove that the *Gospel*'s text was written on data collected form that very place of the crucifixion, and they seem totally verisimilar. Huo! (or woe!) were shouting the elders and the chiefs of Israel and one could say that they commented both compassionately and ironically: he knew how to help others, but lo that they cannot help on Himself... the Son of God!... A deceiver, a naïve, He is the only One to be blamed for the situation which He is in.

Then they justify themselves, they give to themselves a certificate for good, rational, and logical behavior: A! If he was a man of His word, if He gave us a proof of His consistency (and what else would it be peremptory that His descent from the cross?), then, yes, we, as righteous and mindful people, we would immediately recognize Him as our emperor... But so, what should we found our faith on? They allowed to be noticed also a little unjust mercy on that still young unfortunate, but they couldn't avoid telling it also on a *tone of victory*, they couldn't renounce to the occasion for finally mocking Him (finally, officially, and legitimately) on That One Who caused them so many grievances, fears, irritations, and worries; and they were in a hurry, especially in a hurry, a reason why they shortened their pleasure of contemplating the sufferings of the One Who was carrying His own cross and therefore they resorted to Simon of Cyrene when on the way to Golgotha; but while contemplating the Crucified One, they indulged themselves, they had plenty of time for savoring their triumph and explaining it: let Him save Himself, let Him descend from the

cross! If we see that, then we will believe! And they were waiting there full of benevolence and of wisdom…

Linguistic error, of course. This was because they not only had no idea Whom they crucified, but they didn't know either what "to believe" means. If, after being asked by the hierarchs, the Lord had descended from the cross – as Saint Ecaterina of Sienna says it so beautifully: not the spikes were holding Him nailed on the cross but His love for people – the word "faith" would have been abolished forever and the Kingdom of God would have been installed suddenly. The *fact* of the descent couldn't have been believed, but only ascertained, recorded, taken notice of it in the fullness of its evidence. So, it would have been imposed as such and it would have annulled any chance of survival of the enigmatic verb *to believe*. Believing isn't synonymous with: *to prove*, *to demonstrate*, *to be obvious*, neither with the syntagm: "*to believe because*"[24]. Believing removes any doubt, any reserves, and motivation. The sudden apparition of an immense red bird fallen off the sky, write Kierkegaard, facing an extraordinary and sensational event it wouldn't allow the people not to realize that they are facing a *certain sign*[25], a sign like those signs perseveringly asked for by the Pharisees and by scribes. The descent from the cross, on Golgotha, it would have been a gigantic colored bird, after the apparition of which the hierarchs and all the people gathered in that perimeter would have had nothing more to do but to obey the evidence, to kneel down, and to sing *Hosanna*!

The godhead doesn't work like that, the Lord didn't understand in that manner the verb *to believe* each time He uttered it, especially when He talked to Thoman at eight days after resurrection. All the Pauline texts show that this basal word of the Christianity – the faith – it is presented as stranger to any ascertaining deeds, to any written papers, to any paragraphs, to any visible evidence. *Let's see* and *believe*, say the hierarchs, and there cannot be a more acute contradiction. If they saw there was no need to believe; what the evidence would have imposed to them with its irresistible power it would have removed any doubt. *Believing* means *not seeing*. Saint Apostle Paul is as clear as one can be: "But the seen hoe is no longer a hope. How could one hope for what he sees?" (Rom. 8: 24). Or: "And the faith is the entrustment about the hope

[24] On the contrary: Believing mean believing despite certain realities; believing against probabilities, statistics, law of the big numbers. It is an adversative verb, it is a defiance, it is a challenge, it is a throwing of the gauntlet towards the human ghost of the world, of the orders, or the searches, of the laws, and of its inexorability. I believe in Christ despite there is death, illnesses, sufferings, injustices, crimes, torture, denunciation, sadism, and all sort of other evil things. Despite the awful spectacle, I accept the idea of a Savior and of e Comforter.

[25] Sartre holds that the signs, all of them, they are susceptible to diverse interpretations. Although, that one given in the example from Kierkegaard is monovalent.

things, the proving of the unseen things" (Hebr. 11: 3). Or more: "Not looking at the seen things, but at the unseen things" (2 Cor. 4: 18). And the entire chapter no. 11 of the *Epistle towards Jews*, verses as those from *Romans* 4: 13 and the followings; or *Ephesians* 3: 17 and the followings, they too show us clearly that the main entity in the relationship between man and God has nothing to do with *the smoking gun* (as the English people say), the fragrant certitude, the indubitable. And, still, that is the condition and the essence: "The righteous will be alive by his faith" (Rom. 1: 17; Hebr. 10: 38). The text from Corinthians 2: 4-5 perfectly completes the already said things: "And my word and my preaching doesn't consist of words destined to persuade the human wisdom, but in confessing the Ghost and the power. This is in order your faith not to be in the people's wisdom, but in God's power". The French Reformates honored beautifully the memory of the Admiral de Coligny, by writing on his statue from Rue Saint-Honoré from Paris, the words from Hebrews 11: 27: "He remained steadfast, as one who sees the unseen One".

Believing is totally different from the seemingly similar "believing because of" and it doesn't have any connection with the sense of the sight usually reckoned as the firmest and the mot undeceiving. Jurt on this one – so confident in itself! – he sometimes contradicts it and he removed it. Believing means believing without seeing, to guarantee (and there were époques in history when guaranteeing was paid with the life) experimentally unchecked assertions, unprobed on the ways of the senses. The faith in the Pauline texts is mainly close to these three elements: the freedom (opposite to slavery), the ghost (opposed to the letter), and the joy (opposed to sadness). They are not at all categorical deeds, univocal signs, and imperative visual signs.

Therefore, the faith is identified to what Pascal, Kierkegaard, and the existentialists were to call as risk, bet, adventure; André Gide, a gratuitous act; Henri Bremond, a pure poetry. An *unmotivated* act! Do you understand, as Gide suddenly exclaims while being engulfed by enthusiasm, do you understand, an unfounded act, totally without a cause, explanation, rationality, plausibility! Locked in itself! Only that, in order to exemplify, Gide (in *The Dungeons of the Vatican*) chooses a crime lacking material interests and coherence, a *sine ira et studio* assassinate. But if the example is removed (an example, at its turn, mostly ironical), the qualifiers of Gide are identically applied to the faith and they describe the faith unmistakingly. I don't believe because of not having certain proofs. The proofs: scientific, historical, geographical, literary, scriptural, logical etc. etc. they can eventually strengthen the faith (despite this mode of expressing is wrong: a true faith cannot be increased from outside, its intensity doesn't depend on the apport of relative

and submitted to interpretation considerations); they can provide the faith – in front of the people – with a rational justification, and that must not necessarily be disregarded – but it is by no means decisive. Not even the most emotional proofs and the most scientifically checked proofs, not even those can constitute an exception (as, for instance, the Shroud from Torino could be).

Descending form the cross would have been an act of authority, of constraint, of forcing the will and the freedom, of replacing the faith by evidence. The attentive research on the *Gospels*' texts and meditating at them urges us to reach the conclusion that this wasn't the "working style" of our Lord. Not with evidence, not with proofs, but seemingly quite the opposite. He liked proceeding mysteriously and dubitatively, always allowing the possibility of noticing a certain dose of incertitude and of conceiving the validity of some doubts. Jesus didn't produce anything written by Him, He only wrote in the sand; His portraits doesn't exist except that one imprinted on Veronica's veil and that destined to King Avgar – both of them lost; we don't have – as the English people love saying – independent confirmations. The *Gospels* can anytime and by anybody contested as being biased and wrote by some partisans of the cause, and therefore non-objective, or even too late and processed *post factum*; even the little material from Tacitus, from Plinius the Younger, or from Josephus Flavius, it was accused of interpolations; and the apologists' arguments, all of them are nonhistorical, and they belong to the very relative philosophy. One could say that Christ did everything in order us not to have any possibility of invoking sur and tangible arguments, in order Him not to be counted among the historical characters. In order not to diminish in any ways the potency of the verb *to believe*, and in order not to diminish anything of the wonderful value of any act of faith, but to integrally preserve its power, virtue, and originality. Certain proofs in this sense, materially, juridically, and scientifically, we don't' have and we neither will have until the fulfillment of the time and until the second coming, when, of course, the faith will disappear, as also Saint Paul ascertains in his *First Epistle towards Corinthians* 13.

The Lord, what does He requires from us, actually? Us to believe, and "absurd" act, illogical, noncausal, and which cannot be explained in concrete language, an insanity and a madness in the eyes of the intelligent Greeks or of the countless individuals of common sese from all over the old world. Sons of the freedom, and not of the slavery, we are treated with respect: we are not imposed anything, we are not constrained by absolute events as that one claimed with strong (and honeyed) voices by the enemies of Christ; what they wanted – with such ingenious perfidy – would have been later on reduced to an

ascertainment and the faith it would have been lost its meaning. “My faith – as Joris Karl Huysmans, the Flemish write of French language, the fiery converted – my faith is not leaning neither on my rationality, not on the more or less certain perceptions of my senses; it belongs to an inward feeling, of a surety achieved through inward proofs”.

Of course, that the verb *to believe*, as foundation of the religion, it seems to be strange. Why just such a difficult to be understood vocable, one difficult to be defined and specify, to constitute the core of the Christianity? Couldn’t have been possible to the Lord and to his Apostles to find one lass mysterious, one more accessible to the understanding of the crowd of people and, after all - why not? – less scandalous and confusing to the rationalist scientists and to logisticians, and, of course, to the other side of the barricade of those who are locked up on prejudgments?

If we address ourselves to the science, we will find out that there too the basal substantive used in order to clarify the composition and the maintaining of the universe is also one too less logical, too less tangible; vague, confuse, pluri-valent term that also if related to the *domain of the affection and of the* feelings, a term that is also a stumbling stone to that supposed mathematical and material rigor of the science, and especially of the astrophysics, of the astronomy, and of the mechanics. The key word of the cosmical organization is called *universal attraction*. *Attraction*! This is because the gravitational law is this and it is nothing else, in the words of his own formulator. And what can be more emotional, gentler, more indefinite, and less solemn and cold?!

Lo why both the verb *to believe* and the substantive *faith*, they must arise a more appeased bewilderment in a domain as that of the religion; the *attraction* and the *faith* are in the universe’s physics or in the people’s hearts equally unconcordant to the figures, to the severity, to the systematics, equally “nonscientific” in the pedant meaning of this qualificative.

Out of a more attentive understanding of the verb *to believe* it seems to be that there result numerous consequences. Three of them seem to be worthy to be mentioned here, briefly:

1. Once the essence is constituted by faith, one can affirm that the ascesis acts have only an individual and educative importance. The text form Colossians 2: 20-23 help us to understand a seemingly daring enunciation. The Apostle of the Gentiles asks himself why the people who believe in Christ endure commandments as: to not take, to not taste, do not touch?! Then, by calling those as things meant top perish by usage according to some human rules and teachings, he concludes: “some like these *have some countenance* of wisdom in their *apparent piousness*, in humbleness and in not sparing the

body *but they have no value* and they are only for the satisfaction of the body". The asceses, therefore, are not condemned (let that not be!) or minimalized, but it is delimited their gravitational, magnetic, and value field: they are good as acts of restraint and humbleness, as "spiritual exercises", as discipline, but they don't' attract by themselves that what only the grace, the faith, and the good deeds, altogether, they can provide us with;

2. We ought not to allow ourselves be tempted by the spell (of obsession) of searching for and finding the proofs; such proofs can help some people, but not them who know that "Christ didn't' want to found His spiritual Kingdom on the sand of the illusions (*i.e.*: scientifical, historical, and so on), but on the granite rock of the faith".

All the philosophical, historical, or scientifical arguments are submitted to the relativity of these everchanging disciplines. Ptolemaeus replaced Aristarch of Samo; Copernicus on Ptolemaeus; Einstein on Copernicus. Waiting for the day when, probably, the tachyons or any other unobserved yet phenomenon or other calculations will question the theory of the relativity;

3. If by faith we get closer to Christ in the most consummate manner, if the faith is the good path to salvation, it is not less true that without deeds the faith is death (Jas. 2: 17). More than that: here on earth "one believes with his heart towards justice and with his mouth he confesses towards salvation" (Rom. 10: 10). The faith, as one could say by interpreting the apostolic words, it is enough in the *me-you* type of relationship between his Savior. But in the more complicated relationships among man – environment – God and man-fellow human – Christ, the salvation implies also the *confession of the faith*, the courage of publicly proclaim it, in front of the others, and of not rejecting or feeling ashamed of Christ or of your faith. The verb *to believe* reaching thus in a twofold manner as foundation of the hope for salvation. As also, in order to prove the *sincerity and seriousness* of our faith we are required also to do good deeds, in the same way in order us to prove our fearlessness and lack of shame in front of people we must also confess our faith "by mouth", towards exterior. Because we don't believe in Christ only in our quality of individual being, of incomparable soul, but also as man-in-the -world, as man-among-people. *I believe Lord and I confess*. These two verbs are interrelated, they characterize us, they make us true sons of the heavenly Father. The conclusion cannot be other: not "proving" it the completion of "to believe", but "to confess". And if it is so, aren't the good deeds and the non-reticent confession of faith the best *proofs* of the faith? The faith doesn't need any sort of proofs, but it needs *to be proven*. The good deeds and the confessing by mouth – only them – they transform the verb *to believe* in a power, and they provide it with the

energetical and spiritual load necessary for passing it from among the words in the rank of those “force-ideas” which Alfred Fouillée wrote about.

## THE TRAGEDY OF JUDAH

Juda's tragedy was to some thinkers, dramaturgists, people of good faith, and dilletantes of the theology, an urge for trying to exonerate him. Their reasoning is by and large easy to understand and assimilate: if the Iscariot hadn't betrayed Jesus to Sadducees, the divine plan couldn't have been fulfilled and the salvation wouldn't have taken place. How could we condemn him who only played his role, who was a necessary wheel in a gearing, and indispensable condition for an action which couldn't have taken place without the presence of a "traitor"? Is it right him to be condemned and despised because of doing what he must do?

This is the conclusion of the theater play written by Paul Payna! (*He Suffered under Pointius Pilate*), played on the scene of the French Comedy in the year 1938.

My opinion is that of admitting the full guilt of Judah and ascertaining that Paul Raynal's arguments are wrong. Regardless hos seductive they are by the generosity they prove, and regardless how laudable would be his desire for exonerating a defendant. It is not appropriate us to exonerate Judah because he is effectively culpable and there are not reasons for acquitting him.

In the first place, it is good to specify that God used Judah's worthlessness, knowingly, but that doesn't mean at all that He gave Judah his destiny of being a traitor. The Iscariot hadn't been "distributed" in his negative role, but because of being fore-known what lawlessness he followed to commit, there was elaborate a plan which his wickedness was one of the pieces of the gearing in. If we a convinced about somebody's lawlessness and, when the occasion occurs, we ascertain that he behaves lawlessly, as we expected him to behave, from here it won't turn out that the respective individual isn't guilty because he only performed his role.

Passing to the actual content of the matter, we can ascertain that the big sin of Judah – in the Paul Raynal like argumentation – it is one of dement pride: his will to raise himself at the rank of collaborator of God and of participating to the act of the salvation form non-human positions. Yes, it is not excluded that Judah thought as Paul Raynal and others suppose he did: he could say to himself that if there was no other man to betray Jesus Christ to the Judaic authorities, Jesus could not suffer and so His savior mission couldn't be fulfilled. And then Judah took this task upon himself, consenting to appear as a traitor to the vulgus' eyes. By reasoning like this, Juda forget about (or he claims that he forgot) what he is and where he is. What he is: a man; and where he is; on this earth. Juda's reasoning (in the case we admit

Raynals' reasoning as a verisimilar hypothesis) implies the firm conviction that Judah is equal to God and that Judah is at who knows what privileged realm where the usual people have not access to. Judah believed himself being and he wanted himself to be a *co-redemptor*: this was his huge, miserable, and tragical mistake. He reasoned too subtly and too sophisticatedly and he was unimaginably proud.

What could he do? What should he have done? To judge infinitely more simply and more humanly, I could say more like an old man. He ought to constantly tell to himself, whenever he was visited by the demonical temptation of assuming the role as *co-redemptor*: get back satan, I am not but a sinful man. Don't alure me with tasks belonging to the ones from high. Isn't there anyone else to bring to completion the divine oikonomia? I cannot believe that God is unable to find other means for that. Anyway, I don't know. I won't mix up with this. It is not my business, as man. It is God's business. May God do what He know and how he thinks that it will be better. I am not God, I know one and only thing: I won't sell and I won't betray my friend and teacher.

If Judah had thought thus – simply, maturely, modestly – he wouldn't have ended committing his awful sin. Himself admitted that that was a sin, once he was tormented by remorse, he restituted the money and he finally committed suicide.

They who try to defend Judah, they commit a mistake similar to Judah's sin: they judge too subtly and to sophisticatedly. Here everything is due to the complication, to the pride, to leaving the ground of the slightly-rudimentary common sense. But in limit situations, in delicate and dubious situations, the sole solid criterion, the only refuge is the common sense, the supreme solution is the coarse simplicity. This is our escape, this is our shore, this is our rock, this is our foundation, this is our stronghold: *feste Burg*. What should have Judah done? He should have not preoccupied himself with things regarding God and belonging to God's endless wisdom. Hadn't Judah sold Jesus? There would have been found another solution for accomplishing the sacrifice. God hadn't depended exclusively on Judah bar Simon of Keriot and there would have been found a way without him being involved in it. Judah's duty was to judge simplistically, with a total lack of imagination and without thinking at wide perspectives: the more stubborn, the more limited, the mot beastly, the humbler: I am not God, neither am I *co-redemptor*, I am a poor man: I won't sell my friend and my teacher. I know only this (a thing known to everybody, from ancient times). Nothing else. I won't go out from here. Is it my reasoning limited and narrow? Let it be. But I won't get far from it. I spoke. Do whatever you know and leave me alone. It doesn't fall to me the task of saving the world, I

have infinitely more humble contributions, and I am fulfilling those. It can be, therefore, that the reasons determining Judah have been subtler and more complicated that that indicated by Saint Apostle John in his *Gospel*. But, as also in the case of Brutus or of Raskolnikov, justifying a crime it is consummately covered by the horror of the linguistical term which always imposes its name, and not the arguments and the philosophical-cerebral justification of the self who is committing it. Regardless how Nietzschean would have been the inward debate of the intellectual Raskolnikov, and, actually, regardless how spiritually "disinterested" his long-thought crime was, after all it still was a double and sordid crime in the eyes of the organs of the trivial police and of the prosecution inquiring it. Regardless how sublime and patriotic were the motifs of Brutus when stabbing the dictator who wanted to be an emperor, there still was the blood of his adoptive father spilled, and the existential history – the unavoidable reality – it recorded only the words: "You too, son". It could be that Judah was pushed by his simple greediness (without actually being preoccupied with any intention for participation to a redemption plan that would have remained unfulfilled if he hadn't intervened), but the posterity recorded him as a traitor and his name will always be synonymous to treason.

The spirit, before engaging with the phenomenality, it ought to arm itself with much humbleness and it ought to know what it is doing:

a) both with the unpredictable and amazing complication of the life and

b) the old, merciless, cynical names given to the works and to the deeds and which have the power and the gift to set in their place, defiling and coldly, even the most sophisticated reasonings and the best intentions. Crime, adultery, treason, are the names given with cynical and egalitarian indifference, by the phenomenal world, to some actions behind which there stay complicated and sometimes inexpressibly pure considerations. Why would the reality care? The reality doesn't examine your heart, your entrails, and your mind, but it opens the old moldy dictionaries and the newest argotic supplements in order to extract from there the most stinky and the most "ordinary" terms, heavier because of the burden of all the ancestral lawlessness.

These things would have been understood by any inquiry organs who had submitted Judah to an investigation, and they would have finished him quickly.

- Did you go to the priests?

- Yes, but you see…

- Do you admit that you took money from them?

- I admit that, but I didn't ask them for money. They forced me to take it.
- Answer the questions with yes or no. Did you take the money?
- Yes.
- Did you show to the priests where the soldiers should come?
- I wanted something totally different…
- Yes, or no?
- Yes.
- Did you kiss Him?
- He was my friend.
- Did you kissed Him in order to identify Him to the soldiers?
- I didn't want to…
- Did you sell Him and did you identify Him to the priests' soldiers?
- But I gave the money back and I committed suicide.
- Just that proves you as admitting your guilt and as being an informant.

There is in words a stench of the wear, and there it dwells into deeds an irresistible concreteness to which the subtlety of the arguments and the complicated gentle sophism of the motivation cannot withstand to.

The intentions of the dramaturgist Paul Raynal (otherwise a good quality writer and the author of some noble and beautiful plays) were good, but his error was total.

## A CONTRIBUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE EPIPHANY

The uncontestable success and the increasing influence of some sciences as there are the semiotics, the bionics, the cybernetics, the informatics, it couldn't have ended but forcing the entrance into the theological vocabulary of some terms used by the mentioned sciences. Even more than that, they have started influencing even the mode of posing the questions and of formulating the problems.

An example is constituted by the mystery of the Epiphany, which an increasingly well-known preacher doesn't shy to present it in a language taken from the theory of the communications.

The priest J.-M. Lustiger, today a cardinal – archbishop of Paris (*Sermonnes d'un curé de Paris*, Fayard Publishing House, 1978), when speaking to his believers about epiphany, he indeed starts with fixing some premises directly connected to the signs' science and to astrophysics.

The astronomers and the astrophysicists asked themselves (and especially the linguists), which could be the easiest way to establish some contacts between mankind and eventual extraterrestrial beings (whose existence wasn't excluded by Saint Basil the Great in his *Hexaemeron*). Camille Flammarion, a quarter of the century back from now, supposed that the geometrical figures and the graphical demonstration of the geometrical theorems would offer the basis for a common language. Others – a comfortable solution, adopted by almost all authors of scientifical-fantastical stories – imagine the direct transmission of the thought. They believed (this is the theme of the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Degree*) also that some cords and octaves could have the power to musically constrain the UFOs to land. (That would be a particular case of the resonance's principle.

This is not a factic discussion. Whether, really, there are rational beings outside Terra, finding a language, in other word a "code", a signs system intelligible to both parties, it is essential and previous to a fruitful contact (this is because one could ask: could it be that the extraterrestrials have been trying to communicate to us but we are unable to perceive their message?).

Starting, and not without courage, from these data, the cardinal-archbishop Lustiger calls us to think at the way which the divinity solves in this central and terrible problem. Once God is totally different form the created being, once between Creator and created, between cause and effect, between potter and pottery the difference is not of degree but it is of nature, once we cannot define and understand God by using our mental categories and the attributes available to our human uttering – but only apophatically -, once

there is a rift, a hiatus, a discontinuity, a precipice between infinite and worldly, and the man cannot stay "face-to-face" with the Almighty, the two persons' (divine and human) connection represent one of the most difficult to solve "practical" matters. In the Old Testament the Lord calls the man on his name, He shouts out at him and the man answers: lo me, Lord. The theologians of the XX Century reckon this modality of communication and obsolete[26] and, identically to Lustiger, they search for an adequate solution for the knowledge achieved during the last decades, to the methodology and to the logistics accepted by the new demarches of our judging power. (It is not, actually, about a "reconsideration" of the existing situation or of the scriptural text or of the Holy Tradition, but it is a reformulation in the terms of the contemporary gnoseology).

What did God when facing the problem of entering the communication with His creatures when He reckoned to reveal Himself more clearly and to open to them the gate of the deliverance? God designed a solution characterized by Lustiger as being as unexpected and as strange as one can get (cf. also to cp. J. B. S. Haldane: the universe isn't only beyond our power of understanding but it is also beyond our power of imagination). God didn't use either mathematical formulas or UFOs, or electromagnetic waves, or energy discharges, or ectoplasmic apparitions caused by the invocations of the ones gathered around a table without iron nails. God didn't search for a "way", or a "means", or some *telepathy*. God didn't work from distance, or distant.

In order to create the connection bridge God did something that neither with the thought, nor with the rationality, nor with the imagination could have been us the people reach at: He made Himself a child and He was born out of a woman. And then He climbed the cross in order Him to die as a malefactor.

It was, actually, as Lustiger continues (and the whole this slightly presumptuously scientific discussion must not scandalize us for it is in good faith and it only betrays a weakness of some Catholic theologians for adopting as recent as possible terminology) the only possible, logical, and convincing solution, despite its consummate appearance of absurdity. Any other solution wouldn't have provided us with a full understanding, and it wouldn't have created a totally clear semiotics for the man. It would have allowed a *distance* to subsist, taking heed at the circumstance that the divine inquiry (the research *in vivo*, as less influenced as possible by the temporality) it would

[26] The prophets, rightly so, they spoke and they transmitted oral messages. Although, let's not forget that they, by and large, manifested perturbator symptoms for a good reception: they foamed at their mouth, the mumbled, they prophesized a difficult to understand and a polysemantic metaphor. Their holiness was an agitated one and it could be likened to the possession by uninitiated.

have been done on the grounds of some information gathered form outside, and not out of an existentialist experimentation of the "human condition", of the life limited by space and time.

The epiphany becoming a case of the theory of the communications (a chapter of the informatics), one should ascertain that the Christlike solution of the difficulty (*id est*: the embodiment) it is less strange and less paradoxical than one could say. In order to establish a connection as less vitiated as possible by perturbator factors and by deforming external agents between A and a, A *becomes and He makes Himself* (*Verbum caro factum est*). This solution – a direct one, "economical" and rapid, if not tempestuous too, and, anyway risky too: everything depended on the consent of the Virgin, A in the moments of the Good Annunciation was f(a). It has another name too: it is also defined as *love*. Insomuch God loves the man so that in order Him to unveil Himself to the man as less reticent and as more intelligible as possible, He identified Himself to the man, He took the man's nature, He submitted Himself to a transfiguration: He recomposed Himself as man. The kenosis is the *simplest* solution, maybe, the surest (doubtlessly) for it is the most complete and the most engaging, but it doesn't remain less ingenious or less striking.

In order the man to be absolutely convinced about the sincerity, the seriousness, the totality and the irreversibility of the divine solution it was necessary that the identification of A to the man not to allow the man even the slightest dose of suspicion or of a game or of a forgery, or of maintaining a discontinuity or of a possibility line for withdrawal. Therefore, Christ (and this is exactly what the Monophysites[27] didn't notice) He assumes the two more specific and more faithful situations of the human condition. By being born out of woman and by dying in awful torments – and this word, this verb must be taken in its most precise, most semiotic, most Saussurian acceptation – that the *humbleness* and the *suffering* were preferred top any other procedures because of being those which don't deceive, which *cannot* deceive, which don't allow any doubts, which certify the identification, and which remove from origin any possible suspicion. The secret of the Christlike epiphany (where the blood is the price, where the payment, therefore, proves to be a chart which cannot be forged or eluded) it of course is the kenosis – the technical secret. But the mystery of the work - the emotional secret – belongs to another

[27] The fantasists, the Docetism, and the Monophysites commit what Walter Benjamin called a semantic error. One can also say that in order to decode the divine message they use a wrong cypher (or key). There's no wonder that the meaning of the message eluded them, that they read the message "backwardly", so that they attributed a double play to divinity, or theatrics.

domain, it belongs to the domain of the ghost and of the ineffable: it is the love[28].

Only the love can explain, be a base, and justify the road chosen by the Christlike epiphany: I don't get closer to the man, I don't listen to him attentively, with benevolence, with solicitude, I don't resemble to the man, I don't take appearance of man, but I *make Myself* man. I too become a servant. I too chain myself in chains. I heal the leper by touching him. I substitute Myself.

So are confirmed, are clarified, are plentifully strengthened the sayings of Saint Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13), that among all the existing things the greatest and the most mysterious is the love. And why, at the end, after the disappearing of the hope and of the faith, there will last only the love[29]? This is because the insignificant ones, the inutile ones, they perish like the smoke, they melt down as the wax close to the fire. This is for there will no longer be needed common signs, or a language, for it will have been entered the phase of the direct communication – without mirrors, without riddle, without codes, without possible or even unavoidable transmission errors – on the level of the signified.

The cosmos now inundated (according to the theory of Stefan Lupasco) exclusively by photons, it is clean of signs.

And the signified, the meaning of the entire action (or tragedy), from manger to Cross, from Bethlehem to Golgotha, it is summarized only by this word of *love*, more mysterious, more fascinating, more untranslatable (to our sinful feelings, to our corrupt thought, to our limited imagination) than any other word.

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[28] Cf. Virgil Stancovici, *The Philosophy of the Integration* (Bucharest, 1978): the relations between the uncreated universe and the created universe are described as staying under the sign of the pathing and of the love.

[29] Leaving the world after completing His mission, He took with Himself the stigmas and the cross, certain symbols of the realm of the pains and of the injustice. The corollary of the reciprocal theorem of the kenosis is the deification of A. The stigmas worn by Christ in heavens (and the cross, which the popular imagistic doesn't separate Him either there), confirm the correctness of the interpretation given by the Synod of Chalcedon. The presence of the cross in the supreme of the height, on the right hand of Him Who sits on the right hand of the Father, it is not incongruent or strictly sentimental, but it is a proof of the fact that the embodiment wasn't an "adventure", a "crossing through", but it was a full merging and an engagement lacking any ways of withdrawal, a situation equivalent to the burning of the bridges behind the attacking troupes. Lord Savaot! Christ the Victorious!

## IT WILL BE TAKEN AWAY FROM YOU

Matthew 21: 33-34

The Pharisees, of course, they immediately understood – and the Sadducees together with them – the example of the evil workers. And it wasn't too hard to interpret such a transparent parable. Once they whom the vineyard was entrusted to (namely the revelation as reserved to them and with their ancestors was concluded the covenant) showed themselves as unworthy of the trust granted to them and of the mission they received, what else could follow but being they replaced for others at the time of the good fruits? The prophets were killed; they followed to crucify the Son. (in text: the servants, the inheritor). Of course, the vineyard ought to be taken from the evil ones and given to be tended and worked by others, more trustworthy. (This logical consequence was deduced by the people in cause too).

But I think that in that parable from Matthew, chapter no. 21, verses 33 to 44, it is about something deeper and more comprising than – I am using here juridical terms – a simple novation by changing the mandatary. It is proposed to us in order to be approached with emotion itself the terrible and the mysterious – more frightening and more difficult to understand, if not even to conceive, among all – problem of the man's purpose (of the human species) in the universe. Maybe nowhere else in the whole succession of the *Gospels* Christ doesn't appear (though He is not mentioned by name) more obvious in His cosmic hypostasis as Omega point (if we are allowed to use the vocabulary of Teilhard de Chardin), of Mediator between creation and Creator.

It turns out of that parable – is we don't shy to provide it with a wider meaning that the textual one – that we are required to be not only simple partners-signers of a covenant, as in case of the notion expressed by the Hebrew word *brit* that implies an active, constant, and warm participation to the divine plan, a total assumption of the mysterious and immense role which the man is called to fulfill on this earth and, probably, beyond the limits of Planet Earth, on the stretches of the galactic spaces and times. We cannot stay passively and indifferently, let aside resisting by lawlessness, by staining and compromising ourselves through low and ugly deeds, and so getting far from the All-Keeper through interesting calculations, through our care for getting rich quickly and other sorts of abominations.

Him to have it will be given to, and him who doesn't it will be taken away from him even what he thinks he has (Mt. 25: 29; Mk. 4: 25; Lk. 8: 18 and 19: 26); So, we are treated and rewarded proportionally with the intensity of the

partaking we manifest with the non-prophane (taking heed at the danger that getting us accustomed to worship Mamon we will sink increasingly irremediably in the quick sands of the drought and of the lack of water). Out part cannot be but next to the Father Who is still working (Jn. 5: 17) and next to the Son who is coworker; we are required, as the vineyard workers were too, *fruits*, in other words deeds, actions, collaboration.

And if not, if we show ourselves as incapable and unworthy – or hostile, malefactors, active agents of the evil – the job cannot but remain suspended and deserted, and it will be taken away from us and given to some other people to fulfill it. Our responsibility is collective, it is of the entire human species, at least of those who are conscious and in the situation of being able to determine the course of the events, of those who cannot invoke the odious excuse "I didn't know" of the culpable argument "that's not my business" (with the variant:" I am not the guardian of my brother").

"Working the vineyard" doesn't refer only to Pharisee and Sadducees, but to itself the Israelite nation, to itself the mankind, to itself the synchronism of the man's activity with the divine, cosmic, and soteriological plan.

Don't you want this? It is too much for you the role which you have been distributed to play in? Are you overwhelmed by the greatness of this mission? Has the old flame been quenched to you? Have you lost your virtue from yore? Have you got strayed among temptations and have you fallen into the slavery of the passion? Well, there will be found somebody to work on My behalf. The so-called faithfulness of the Jews to the Old Testament is apparent and totally illusory. When the Lord tells them that if they truly believed in Moses they would believe in Him too, for Moses prophesized Him (Jn. 5: 46), He refers just to that circumstance that those who estranged themselves from the Law are the Jews because of rejecting all the prophecies (so numerous, so striking) about Jesus-Mesiah of the Covenant. By denying the prophecies and the delivering meaning of the Old Testament, the Jews and not the Christians are the authentic contestants of connection with the Teaching and with the Scripture. Christ talks about Himself as about One Who didn't come to change the Law but to fulfill it, and He says that no letter will fall out of the Law (Mt. 49: 8; Lk. 16: 17). Making of Christians some people rebelled against *The Old Testament* means committing a profound perspective error, they are the new Israel carrying forwards the universal mission of the chosen people, parting with those who kept from the Law only the formal provisions, quantifying them in six hundred and thirteen positive and negative commandments.

The vineyard workers are asked for the fruits of the vineyard because those fruits represent the essential (Mt. 7: 16: "You will know them according

to their fruits"). They not only killed the envoys od the Master (the prophets) and His Son (Jesus), but they also betray the cause of the vineyard, its purpose, namely the man's mission to spiritualize the life, to give a meaning to the universe, to make the universe the garden of God. Just out of this lack of fruits comes the accusation directed against the Jews. They will be surpassed by the men from Nineveh and from the queen from South. They are surpassed by Samaritans (the merciful one, the only grateful leper, the woman from Sychar transformed in heralder for Christ-Messiah). The tending of the vineyard will be taken away from them and entrusted to other people: "And I am telling you that many from East and from West will come and sit at the table with Abraham and with Isaac and with Jacob in the Kingdom of Heavens. And the son of the kingdom will be thrown in the outer darkness: there will be the weeping and thew gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 8: 11-12). "That's why I am telling you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and it will be given to that nation which will bring fort their fruits" (Mt. 21: 43). Aren't the referring to the widow woman from Sarepta of Sidon (whose house prophet Elijah was sent to) and to the healing by prophet Elisha of Neeman the Syrian (while many were leppers in Israel) also clear allusions to the universalistic character of the new preaching and also referring to the unworthiness of those who, by killing the divinity's envoys, they didn't stop bragging with their title as sons of Abraham and exclusive owners of the salvation? To no avail will all the workers of the injustice invoke their neighborhood or kinship with the Son (Lk. 13: 26), because they will be answered again: "I don't know who you are, get away from Me, you won't be partakers to the Kingdom of God, where are Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and you will be thrown out of it" (Lk. 13: 27-28).

Christ didn't lose any occasion for affirming His solidarity with the revelation form *The Old Testament*, and the perfect continuity with the teaching of the prophets and of the *Torah of Moses*. He preached in the Temple and in synagogues, He defended the cleanness of the Temple by chasing away the moneychangers, He obeyed the circumcision, He observed the rule regarding the right of prophesizing only after being thirty years old, he plentifully quoted form the Decalogue and He considered the translation in deed of the ten commandments as a ground for achieving the eternal life (Mt. 10: 17: "And if you want to enter the life, keep the commandments". See also Mk. 10: 19-21; Lk. 10: 25-29 and 18: 20-21). The peak moment of the tight connection between *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament* is constituted by the presence of Moses and of Elijah at the right hand and at the left hand of the Savior in the wonder of the Transfiguration. Then and there, on the atemporal Tabor, it is proven in the most doubtless manner also the prophetic character

of *The Old Law* and the lack of any solution of continuity between the two revelations: one being preparator and another being fulfiller.

Only that the trait of being sons of Abrahm and of the free woman, of receivers of the divine message, of empowered to spread the godlike word, it is insufficient for excusing their grave deviations and for guaranteeing the impunity after committing the shouting-at-sky lawlessness. It will be in vain invoking then the illustrious ancestors and the great titles. The importance hasn't origin (regardless how noble), importance and reality have only the deeds, the fruits, the feeling. In purely pragmatic language the Lord utters: "According to their fruits you will know them. Do the people harvest grapes out of thorns and figs out of brambles? So that any good tree brings forth good fruits and the evil tree produces bad fruits… And any tree that doesn't produce good fruit it will be hewn down and thrown into fire" (Mt. 7: 16-19).

The Israelite people – ad this is their uncontestable and imperishable merit – recognized God when on the same mountain called with two names, Sinai and Horeb, God spoke to them among lightnings and thunders to Moses, or like a breeze of smooth and sweet wind He showed Himself to Elijah. But when God called them to straightening through the voices of the prophets, this theophorous people didn't know else but to persecute or to kill the word-bearers of the divinity. And when, like the owner of the vineyard, the Father sends His beloved Son in the world, the descendants of the merciful and hospitable father Abraham don't know better but to crucify the Son, namely they stumble on the stone on the corner-stone which also crushed them.

It wasn't possible that the killers of the prophets and of the Son, the evildoers and the producers of sour fruits to continue holding the monopoly of the promise. The promise was to follow (without excluding at all the individual cases of righteousness preservation and therefore the name of "man of God") upon all the nations, on the line of the divine plan of cosmic salvation and of ceaseless enlargement of the knowledge of the truth. The parable of the evil workers tells us in easy-to-understand words about the desertion by the Jews of *The Old Testament* (which they replaced with the *Talmud* – a code of canonical procedure), and about the taking of the first Revelation by Christians. The Law's letter, the Judaism preserves it with a minuteness and with a scrupulousness (some sort of panic of the details) not lacking dramatism and fierceness; but the spirit of the Covenant has been inherited – through and into Christ – by His disciples, his descendants, and His believers who have understood that the letter kills while the ghost give life. Now the vineyard is theirs, in order they to work it, to harvest its fruits, and to enrich it. May them prove themselves as worthy of the mission which they have been appointed to,

which is good and blessed heralding, but which supposes, in the same time, a shaking responsibility.

What is guiding us? *The Old Testament* as prophecy and fore-imagining of *The New Testament, The New Testament* as fulfillment and consummation of *The Old Testament*, namely *The Scripture*, whole, the Word of One and the Samen God Who firstly gave the Law on the Mountain of the Unveiling and then He allowed the consummation of the sacrifice on the hill of the Head, in order to call us to freedom, in order to save us, and in order to open our eyes upon our unparalleled mission on earth and in the world. Oh! if only our mind was lightened in order us to understand, if only our powers were tenfold in order us to be able to commit, if only our zeal was lit up in order us to make out of this all-beautiful vineyard planted by the right hand of God the all-beautiful garden for the flourishing of which His Only Begotten Son climbed the cross.

**IV.**

***PROBET AUTEM SEIPSUM HOMO***

**-BESTOWING YOU WILL ACHIEVE -**

## THE FORGIVENESS

In order us to benefit of speaking about the virtue of the forgiveness – so natural to the Romanian people whoa re always ready to answer affirmatively and even with effusion, with a stretched hand and with a smile, to the words: please forgive me – we must know that the forgiveness is of four kinds: 1. Forgiving those who did us wrong, 2. Forgiving those whom we did wrong, 3. The self-forgiveness, 4. The forgiveness of our sins and of our mistakes by God.

Now let me detail these:

1) Forgiving those who did wrong to us it is simple it is elementary, and it if facile. The nice man forgives without waiting to be asked for long, and he will immediately voice out the magical formula so characteristic to the feeling and thinking being: I am forgiving you, may God forgive all of us. (He knows that himself too is submitted to mistake and he knows or he naturally bears within his self's deep the text of Saint Apostle Paul: "There is no one righteous, there is not one understanding, there is no one searching for God; all of them have deviated, they have become worthless; there is no one to do the good, there's not even one")[30]. The Lord Himself commanded us to forgive anytime and as many times as needed, without any limit; this is for what does it mean the answer given to Peter (Mt. 18: 20-22) "for seventy times seven" else than: for infinite times, being difficult to suppose that the wickedest man will do wrong to us for four hundreds and ninety times on a single day! And in the Lord's Prayer the forgiveness of our sins by God it is conditioned and placed in concordance with the previous forgiving of the mistakes done to us by others, the forgiveness becomes – as the mathematical language says it – function of the individual's capacity of forgiving his fellow humans.

This direct, limpid, and easy way to forgive, it still implied two additions:

a. We cannot forgive but the evil perpetrated to us personally, and not to other people. When a brother of ours is wronged, insulted, hit, rebuked, deceived, we have no quality to ourselves forgive the perpetrator. Even the less so when it is about an individual or a group of individuals or even about a whole collectivity. If such a collectivity or such a nation reached to be the object of a regardless what nature discrimination, if it is persecuted, impoverished, lied to etc. we are forbidden to forgive on its behalf, we have not quality to forgive that.

[30] Rom. 3: 10-12; See also Ps. 13: 2-3 and Ps. 52: 3-4. (In KJB we have Ps. 14: 2-3 and Ps. 53: 2-3 (E. l. t.'s n.)).

Nicolae Iorga, not only an unparalleled historian but also a deep thinker, he was convinced about that, and he too affirmed that each individual can forgive only the evil done to himself, but not to others.

b. It is not enough to forgive, you must also forget. The forgiveness that is not accompanied by forgetfulness too, it won't mean anything, it will be empty words, chatter, fatic discussion, delusion, and a mask for keeping the evil in mind. I knew a priest, a man of great valor (he was my confessor yore), father George Teodorescu from Bucharest. He used to tell his parishioners: "Men and women come to me an tell me: I forgive him but I cannot forget him. I answer them: you are telling me that you can forgive but you can't forget. Very well. But would you like it if after I received your confession and after I uttered: I am forgiving you and I am absolving you, to see how Christ is shouting out to me: you are forgiving him but I won't forget him. So?".

In his novel *Madeleine Ferrat*, Emile Zola describes the awful image of a sinner forgiven by Jesus but not also by God-the Father, because she doesn't forget anything. This work (belonging to the mind of a French writer influenced by Marcionism) it seems to strengthen even more our conviction that the forgiveness lacks its value and charm and expiatory power (and, to openly say it, it has no value) if it is not accompanied by forgetfulness.

There is no doubt about the fact that the forgetfulness if more difficult than the forgiveness is. The forgetfulness is truly difficult. But isn't the whole Christianity difficult? They who come to Jesus, by not taking heed at the cup He drank (the cup of the bitterness, bottom-up) and at the baptism He which was baptized with (His death on the cross), they prove that they don't know which God they worship or which community they are in. Of course, the forgetfulness is difficult, as difficult is to anyone to love his enemy, to turn the other cheek too after being slapped in his face, not to sin either with the deed or with the thought, so bring to fulfillment all the so subtle and radical commandments of the *Sermon from on the Mountain* and, by and large, everything the Lord asks from those who claim and dare to call themselves His disciples.

2. Forgiving those whom we did wrong seems to be a paradox, if not a sophism, and it seems constituting a contradiction, an absurd formulation. How comes we must forgive him whom we harmed? Isn't clear that it is *his* duty to eventually forgive us?

Still, this formulation isn't wrong or forced, and there is no doubt that it is absolutely gentle to forgive them whom we did wrong, namely whom we unveiled the whole our nothingness, souly ugliness, stupidity, evilness, dishonesty, savageness, perfidy, lack of control, lowness, rudeness, and

worthlessness. Them in whose presence we emptied the deeps of our subconscious, whom we unveiled our true colors, whom we became a subject of wonder, we have them. Didn't we show them our dirtiest and ugliest countenance? One doesn't need a too refined psychology in order to understand that we feel more shame of and spite on those whom we did wrong that on those who did wrong to us and who compromised *themselves* in our presence.

Allow us, in this context, to refer ourselves to a theater play belonging to the French dramaturgist Eugene Labiche. It is not but a candid prophane comedy, but it still contains a useful teaching. The play's hero, the wealthy father of a beautiful daughter, he met at a mountain resort two young men who both want to marry his daughter. The father called Perrichon – he slid during a strolling and he was about to fall into a precipice but one of the young men grabbed him by the hand and saved him from falling. That young man was sure of being the chosen after as benefactor of the family. But mister Perrichon didn't hurry to nominate that young man as his son-in-law, and he even tried – because of his wounded pride – to minimalize the fact of being saved, by saying that the so-called precipice was actually only a pit, and that he actually is nimble… the other candidate, astute, he simulated an accident upon himself and that gave mister Perrichon the occasion for proving that he was a valiant savior of lives. This second young man was the chosen one!

Mister Perrichon's case, we think, it facilitates us to understand how big the effort is for forgiving those whom we did wrong, and how much courage one needs for looking them directly in their eyes, for asking for their lenience, for not keeping grudge on them, for not transferring upon them, through a strange psychological complex, the trouble and the embarrassment which overwhelm us.

3. It is difficult to perform the forgiveness described at the number two, but it is even more difficult to forgive on ourselves. This forgiveness on the self probably represents the stage which implies the most embarrassing and intense effort of defeating the lust for giving up and for seeking for shelter in the despair that dwells within each sinner, as a prototype of the integral defeatism.

After we have bitterly repented, after we have confessed our sins without reticence, we have done penitence, we have asked for forgiveness from the bottom of our heart, with the whole our soul, and with the whole our thought, and after we have shed the tears of the expiation, it follows that, in total humbleness and not without trembling, to forgive on ourselves. The *Psalm* no. 50, of course, it urges us to admit our lawlessness and it wants us to always

keep our sin in our mind. Lo an admirable advice. But this keeping of our sin into our mind let it not starting leavening and becoming a spring of poisoning our self and to fall into desperation which has not cure. The living memory of the sin can be salutary; but it is not less true that it can trigger the slow poisoning of our conscience. The French writer Georges Bernanos rightly underscores this kind of forgiveness as it is all the more difficult to be accomplished as it comes in contradiction to the callousness of our heart and to our intrinsic evilness. We are so evil and callous in heart, we are so locked up within the limits of our narrow and dirty horizon, that we barely can imagine that there is the possibility of the forgiveness. We resemble to some troglodytes who cannot think at building the great palaces which are now all over the world.

4. Just because of that, by passing to the fourth aspect of the forgiveness, we find ourselves so little prepared for believing that God will forgive our sins regardless how honest and hot our repentance is. Fortunately, God is unspeakable kinder than we are, and He is always wanting to forgive. The man, though, because of being too less inclined through his fallen nature to believe in others' kindness and who is too little tending to forgive even on himself, he needs a considerable effort for believing in the possibility of the total erase of his sins. The old perspective of the talion and of the compensation still lasts within his thought, and it resists Christ's teaching Who didn't come into the world for healthy, for righteous, and for kind, but for sinners. In *The Old Testament* God unveils Himself to Moses only as a lawyer and as a harsh judge; Christ consummated the Revelation and He unveils to us the Holy Trinity creator, savior, and comforter, namely the God of the mercy.

It would be useless to believe that Christ is the Savior if we didn't believe, equally strongly, each of us, that He mace *for me too*, in order Him to save me, as a Savior *of mine*.

Some people think that, maybe, their sins exceed even the forgiving capacity of God. Because this thought has its origin in our fear of God, in humbleness, in scrupulousness, it is healing and good. But if it causes doubt in the efficiency of the repentance, in the power and in the kindness of God – as Judah thought, and therefore it is generating the despair – it becomes a shouting-to-sky sin, because the truth is that there is no sin whose virulence to be able to break the Creator's love for people. On the other hand, that means also passing very quickly over the very precise words of Saint Apostle Paul from 1 Cor. 6: 9-11, which categorically give the solution of the problem: "Don't you know that the unjust ones will inherit the Kingdom of God? Don't delude on yourself: neither the debauched ones, nor the idols worshippers, neither the

committers of adultery, nor the masturbators, neither the sodomites, nor the thieves, neither the greedy, nor the drunkards, neither the mockers, nor the kidnappers will inherit the Kingdom of God. And so were some of you". Until here, the text seems to be ascertaining and cold. But the tone changes immediately and there it appears the promise of the forgiveness if there the repentance has occurred. The metanoia topples over the situation and it opens the horizon of the salvation: "But you have been washed up, but you have been sanctified, but you have been corrected in the name of Lord Jesus Christ and in the ghost of our God"[31].

It may be good remembering as often as possible the words of Saint Isaac the Syrian: "Don't blaspheme saying that God is just!". At a first glance these words seem to be paradoxical and scandalous, but it actually is profoundly Orthodox and true, and it has nothing in it to offend us. This is for, if God judges according to the justice, we will all be lost, no one will coke out delivered from an exclusively right and accountant-like judgment[32]. God Who, out of His love for His creatures – was not just by allowing to die on the cross That Innocent, He isn't, fortunately and to our hope, righteous in the harsh and merciless meaning of the word. Our God – the Holy Trinity – is the God of the mercy and Who is synonymous to Gor of "injustice", namely to a deeper, more comprising, more mysterious justice, a justice of a superior order. In his untold mercy, God (Whom they told about that he sits on the throne of the judgment only one hour out of twenty-four hours, and for the rest of twenty-three hours He sits of the throne of the mercy) can and wants to forgive us and to save us.

Forgiving is in essence a godlike attribute (the human forgiveness appearing as another proof about the presence of the divine soul within human creature). Only Christ can to erase a shole bunch of sins, only He can erase the records of all the evil deeds and thoughts of a human life. Striving ourselves to forgive and by learning how to practice the forgiveness in its most subtle forms (namely forgiving those whom we did wrong and forgiving on ourselves after we have truly repented), we get close to the understanding of the divine forgiveness. Marcel Jougandeau wasn't afraid of the judgment of Christ, but he feared his own judgment: if it was according to the obtuse human mind and to the callous heart and to his fierce petty human evilness, he would condemn on

[31] See also Eph. 2 and 5: 5-8.

[32] Ps. 129: 3: "For if you look at lawlessness, Lord, Lord, you will be able to stand that?"; Ps. 142: 2: "Do no enter at judgment with Your servant, for no one among the living is right in front of You". (In KJB we have: Ps. 130: "If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?" and Ps. 143: 3: "And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified." (E. l. t.'s n.)).

himself. Rather the kindness and the generosity of our Lord shun us form hell, and not our will. The supreme noblesse of the forgiveness is difficult to access. And the mystery consists just in the fact that the power from above, through mercy and grace, it gets the creature out of the darkness of the stubbornness and it unveils to the creature the light from Golgotha, unfenced, infinite, victorious upon darkness. Let's accustom ourselves to believe in forgiveness, to dare to believe so, to pray for being us healed of non-daring. Let's accustom ourselves not to despair as Judah did – who didn't believe that Christ is enough good or enough powerful for forgiving him – and let's follow to Saint Apostle Peter who repented, who cried bitterly, and who didn't doubt about the forgiving will of his Teacher. Let's not lose on any moment from our sight that we are no longer under the merciless Law, that we are under the grace, namely under mercy and benevolence. Therefore, we must fearfully impropriate the three kinds opf human forgiveness; and let's steadfastly trust the godlike forgiveness. Together, they compose an inseparable whole, they stay at itself the foundation of the Christian faith and they allow us to hope into *the holy merciful injustice* of the Lord, now and at our judgment. Amen.

## THE LORD CAME TO SAVE US AND TO SCANDALIZE US

As sure and as limpid is that the Lord came to save us (Jn. 12: 47: "I haven't come to judge the world, but to save the world"), as logical and as rational is to deduce out of all His deeds and teachings that He knowingly and willingly came to scandalize us. Itself the fact of God's embodiment is an immense scandal and it may be more difficult to conceive and assimilate than anything else. And not only that God puts on a servant body, but He also chose as place of His earthly dwelling an insignificant and occupied country and there He was born out of a family among the simplest ones, in the house of a carpenter (a craftmanship practiced by Himself too). These conditions of the embodiment[33], of course, they caused bewilderment and scandal. "Isn't this the son of the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and of Josephus and of Simon? Aren't His sisters, here with us?" (Mk. 3: 3; *id.*: Mt. 13: 55-56; Lk. 4: 22; Jn. 6: 42). Listing the manly names and using a diminutive have the purpose of highlighting the exorbitant character of the Messianic claims of an individual well stuck into the daily reality; the woman names, according to the Oriental custom, were overlooked. Equally scandalous was the claiming of the quality as Son of God.

Could it be to the strict monotheism of the Judeans any more shouting-at-the-sky claim or any other more worthy of be characterized as blasphemy? But the lord didn't hesitate even once and he ceaselessly was proclaiming Himself as the Son of the Almighty. He claimed for Himself the capacity of forgiving the sins (a godlike attribute) and He described on Himself as one with the heavenly Father.

What sort of people did the Lord lived his earthly life among? Not among scribes (Himself wasn't a very big scholar), not among noble people, not among rich, not among chose or clean or righteous people (Josephus form Arimateea, Nicodemus, Iair are exceptions), but he rather lived among very simple people (fishermen, small clerks), Samaritans (a people plentifully despised by Jews), pagans (namely filthy), sleepwalkers, publicans (collaborators with the occupants, and therefore traitors of their nation), demonized, debauched and whores, unfortunates of the fate, beggars, ill people. And preponderantly ill with repugnant and ugly illnesses: women having blood spillage, leppers, paralyzed, epileptics, blind, mute, maimed, lame, people among the most destitute who can be the drops of the society, the proscribed among the ranks of the nice, normal, and respectable people. He not only visited the Samaritans

[33] The pagan gods too took human image, but only temporarily and always taking care of their honorability.

(as if that wasn't enough!), but He was also in good relations with the enemies of the nation, with the Roman occupants! He healed their servants! The Zelotes, of course, they trembled with indignation, anger, and disappointment. They who hoped so much in Him! He was reckoned as a traitor of the national cause by them from a moment forwards, and they were recording with disgust His pacifist declarations, the praising of the indiscriminate gentleness, the preaching of the mercy, or the resignation, of the general compassion, of the principle of turning the other cheek, of the political indifferentism.

The Pharisee, of course, they would have been the most scandalized. Christ didn't lose any occasion for confronting them, day by day, hour by hour, step by step. Whom? The owners of the teaching, the fierce *Domini canes* of that time, the vigilantes of the Moses's Law, those who placed the letter above the ghost in everything. "Cunning and debauched nation" He calls them. He refuses to give them a sign, He contradicts them, He criticizes the harshly, He ironizes them. He accuses them of their heart's callousness, He calls them "hypocrites" (that must have hurt, it was a truth hitting right on the target), He tells recounts them the history of the evil workers of the vineyard and that of the workers from the eleventh hour who despite not enduring the heat of the day they receive the same payment as those working form the first hour, and He mentioned them the stone disregarded by the masons and which stiller ached in the head of the angle. He told them other cruel things too: that the one from late will the in front and the first ones will be the last ones, and that to Sodom and Gomorrah will be easier on the day of the Judgment than to that city which didn't receive His disciples. And He was not shy to topple over the natural and traditional hierarchy: "He who wants to be the first among you, let him be your servant". (He told these things to His disciples but He was beating the bush). The parable of the workers from the vineyard (Lk. 20: 9 and the followings) would have reached the top. It wasn't necessary for the Pharisees to understand who were the target of that parable and whom that parable was destined to: "The workers will be lost, and the vineyard will be giver to other workers". The allusion was clear as daylight. And "they understood that Jesus said that parable for them". He overwhelmed them with His wise answers and He thwarted their plans, tricks, and ambushes. The great diatribe (Mt. 23: 13-39) had scattered any illusion of theirs regarding a possible agreement, betterment, or allurement. (Didn't they continuously pursuing Him and inviting Him to had dinner and supervising Him, of course, but also in order to try and recruit Him, as they will say later on). The diatribe is the equivalent of breaking any connection bridge.

Blind guides, blind people, tombs, whitewashed tombs, killers, snakes, baby vipers (as they were – *inter alia* – qualified), they were also forced to witness the scene of the anointment with chrism that hurt them to the bottom of their entrails[34]. A double scandal: that He accepted that a debauched woman to come close to Him and to touch Him; and that He approved to be wasted a chrism evaluated to around three hundred dinars instead of commanding to be sold and the money to be shared to the poor people. The virtue: fiercely offended; the avarice (or, well, the careful household feeling) offended! (Were there one, two, three women anointing the Lord with chrism? That doesn't matter here. The texts from Matthew 26: 6-13; Mark 14: 3-9; Luke 7: 36-50; John 12: 3-8 allow diverse interpretations. It is more verisimilar that there were two women. Anyway, the scene shook both the Pharisees' virtue and the monetary reckoning of the disciples, and, we are right to suppose, of all the other hypocrites dressed up in moderation and rationality).

Neither the Sadducees were treated more mercifully. The fact that Jesus had been heralding the resurrection wouldn't have bothered them exceedingly, because they had been tolerating the Pharisees who also believed in resurrection. But the Sadducees reckoned Jesus as a disobedient, if not even as a rebel. They disliked the fact that Jesus rejected the rich young man and the fact that Jesus decreed that it will be difficult to him to enter the Kingdom of Heavens; and Jesus also gave that miserable example, so expressive, of the camel and of the ear of the needle. And when the Sadducees, the hierarchs, and the scribed had been angered by the shouts: "Hosanna to the Son of David", what Jesus answered them? "Haven't you read that out of the mouth of the children and of the toddlers You have prepared praise to Yourself?". Lo them, the most honored cheeks of the country and of the nation, placed below the children and the toddlers! (And Matthew 11: 25: "For You have hidden these from the wise man and You have unveiled them to the children".). That was enough to stir up their anger and upset.

The scribed would have been embarrassed by the first *Blessing* guaranteeing the victory of the poor in spirit and they would have been discontent also with the despise of the teacher for Talmudic subtleties and interpretations (Though they would have had to realize that no whosoever had come to fulfill the Law my making so refined and deep assimilations as that between the sin with the deed and the sin with the thought). The whole sermon from on the mountain is a testimony of high ethical sharpness and of psychological penetrating perspicacity. But why would us be wondering about

[34] Stone of stumble was a scene for disciples too; Mt. 26: 9; Mk. 14: 4-5; Jn. 12: 4-5.

the offense took by the Sadducees, by the elders of the people, by scribes, and by Pharisees when even the Lord's family according to the body reckoned Him as out of His minds? (Mk. 3: 21). Even His disciples of sympathizers crossed through moments of doubts and they felt themselves overwhelmed by the "difficulty" of the words heard from Him, some of them even ceasing to follow Him (Jn. 6: 60 and 66).

Another big scandal: the spectacle of the divinity nailed on the wood of the mocking and of the curse. The shameful, the infamous, the wicked death by being hanged on the wood, after the man was beaten slapped, whipped, spit at, crowned with thorns and mockingly dressed up in "liar purple". Lo the Son of God covered in wound and blood and bruises, hanged between two thieves, reduced to the most abject condition which the human body can be in! The scandal of the crucifixion (and of the lesson: *behold the man*) it is surpassed only by that of the Eucharist: if you don't eat My Body and if you don't drink My blood… The scandal of the confounding the most spiritual act that can exists (the communion with God) to so prosaic and elementary and strictly worldly things as eating and drinking! And even eating human flesh and drinking human blood! How much would have been shaken those who heard these solemn and atrocious urges (and not only among His adversaries), and how much that would have seemed to them – and it doubtlessly was so – as inciting to anthropophagy!

Then the so venerated by Jews Saturday, also called as *malcat sabat*, the queen Saturday. The Saturday transgressed, despised, defied. And Jesus even proclaimed Himself ad Lord of the Saturday (Mt. 12: 3). Then the food and the drink by and large: a prophet admitting about Himself as being "a man eating and drinking wine" (Mt. 11: 19) and Whose disciples didn't fast, would it therefore make us wonder the fact that He was accused that He cast out the devils with the lord of the devils? He approved the chrism to be wasted; He drank, He ate, He multiplied the wine, He didn't wash His hands, he proved to be severe with the righteous ones, he reckoned the Samaritans as better than the Jews, in that parable with the ten leppers healed among whom the only grateful one was a Samaritan, that parable with the merciful Samaritan which the priest and the Levite turned out as reproachable. And whom He confesses Himself? To a Samaritan woman (a double scandal) and to a blind beggar! Above all, He identified Himself to the Father (Jn. 5: 18), He made Himself equal to God. I am the door of the sheep, He said, I am the good Shepherd, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, I am the bread of the life, I am the resurrection and the life, I and My Father are one! What a limitless haughtiness and, on the other hand, how reckless and exaggerated

humiliation. He washed up the feet of His disciples (and Peter almost took offence because of that), He allows Himself to be crucified and killed (and the travelers to Emaus didn't lack much to cross from disturbance to hope). These last motivations regarding the humiliation, they had been invoked but on Golgotha, but the others must have stirred up the direct or the indirect plotters of the assassinate. And then all those discussions referring so transparently and offensively to the authorities… No! For how long are we going to endure that? The only solution is to kill Him.

But there were other scandals too, maybe smaller (some of them), or maybe equally grave (others). The indifference towards the worldly, honored, and rational things (as there would be the wealth, the care for the home, for the field, for kinships, for dead, for sharing the inheritance…), the discretion too far, almost sickly, the absolute passiveness towards the national and social businesses… The sermon from the mountain what is if not an apologetics thought inversely, all the things are toppled over, seemingly to cause the spite and the rebellion of the sapient people… The systematic transgression of the Saturday; the insulting tone towards the hierarchs ("You wander because of not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God" – Matthew 22: 29); the so daring and strange aphorism: to him who has it will be given, and from him who doesn't have it will be taken away even what he has (Mt. 13: 12; Mr. 4: 25; Lk. 8: 18); the stubborn disregarding of the tradition reckoned as: "human commandments" (in other words: paraphernalia! *nugas*!). Hear, good people, He says that the wealth, the land, the family, the trials, the burials are nothing, some whims!… And we, seemingly, we sift the dill, the cumin, and the mint, and washing our hand and the cups and the pitchers would allegedly be who knows what sin! And how much intransigence: leave everything, don't put your house in order, don't bury your father, but – now, on this very moment – follow Me! And our cities: Chorazin, Betsaida, Capernaum placed lower than Tir, Sidon, or even than Sodom and Gomorrha, or Nineveh!… And that one will lose his soul who doesn't follow Him and only that one will gain his soul who put his soul for Him. No, definitely, only if we kill Him, we will get rid of such crazy things!

To the verb *to scandalize* the Lord's enemies gave a primary meaning, that of offense brought to the most venerable ideas and institutions. They weren't capable of noticing the scandal as a pedagogical and therapeutic method, analogue to the procedure called *satori* in Zen, a word meaning: shock. *This* scandal was used by the Lord, with this "bitter herb" He wanted to heal up those who didn't understand, and he wanted to call all the people to an understanding on a superior order.

Still, the Lord didn't scandalize only the Sadducees, the Pharisees, and others *ejusdem farina*, by striking their hypocrisy, their arrogance, their stubbornness, and their blindness. Also, on us – *especially on us* – He came to scandalize, to disturb us, to take us out of indifference, of facile certitudes, of stupid calmness, of readymade ideas, of prejudgments, and of strong limitations. *To wake us up* and this a lot of time *before Kant, to invite us, no? to force us to a critical exam* of our life and of our being and of our purpose in the world; to get us out (both His adversary and disciples) from appearances, to make us facing the final problems of the existence. To pluck us out, as Albert Camus says, from among the paraphernalia and trinkets (ex.: if the earth revolves around the sun or vice versa) and to call us to the most serious and important and decisive ones (what the life is, what the death is, how can we achieve the happiness, how can be cohabit with our fellow human, how can we be delivered…). To wake us up, to shake us up, to submit us to a series of shocks, to do through us and with us a real Kantian operation of extracting out of appearances (*Scheinbare*) the essence (*Ding an sich),* the truth. By shock (scandal) form darkness and confusion to reality and light.

And how will us the Christians know, we who are the friends and the descendants of those who believe in Him from the first moment, how will we know that a deeds, an action, a behavior, a thought of our is or it isn't Christian?

How? According to the *degree of scandal* that deed of thought has. The more scandalous that act or thought is, the surer Christian will that be. And if that is only very little or at all scandalous, we will be able to know that that is very little or at all Christian. The entropy is defined as the parameter expressing the tendency of a system to pass from a less probable state to a more probable state. It is so the Christianity too: the degree of scandal (if I may say so according to the model proposed by the substantive *dangerousness*) it is the determined one. The more this degree is higher, the more the deed will be Christian. If, for instance, I answer to my brother: "I cannot help you now, it is the time for prayer", this saying is at all scandalous, it is sapient, and it proves piousness. But it isn't Christian at all. If I judge: I rather renounce to the sweetness of the religious service rather than not to help my brother, not to let him alone and on his own in his trouble, rather than I not having mercy on him, I might provoke and offend some Pharisee, but I will behave Christianly. If I am in ecstasy but I disregard the need of a sick, I could prove a great piousness, but I won't be a Christian! But – as Ruysbroek and Meister Eckhart say (or even others) – if I quickly get out of my ecstasy and I prepare a soup for the sick and I serve it to him I won't care about the scandal for I obey the

teaching of Christ and I love my brother as on myself and even more. If I am a bishop and the war has started, and I remain peacefully in my cathedral and praying, I give the impression of being a wise and sapient man. But I won't fulfill my duty. But if I do as monsieur Affre, who got out in June 1848 form Notre-Dame Basilica, and I try to reconcile the fighting parties by climbing and standing on the barricades, and I risk to be killed – and I am even killed – I will do my scandalous duty as Christian and as a priest, for the place of the shepherd is to be together with his flock. If, as Saint Hierarch Nicholas reasoned, I have an appointment with God and I am following the example of my companion, of Saint Cassian the Roman, and I don't stop to help this peasant whose cart got stuck in mud, I won't get my coat dirty and I won't be late to appointment. But I am going to do exactly like the merciful Samaritan did, I am going to help this peasant, despite getting my coat dirty and getting late. And when they got in front of God, what happened? Who was praised by the Lord? Not the immaculate Cassian but Nicholas, whose name will be the most popular while the other will be remembered by ten thousand people at most.

"Blessed is him who won't be offended into Me", sys the Lord. We haven't been offended and we haven't been scandalized by His surprising actions and declarations, we have intuited their savior character. We, unlike the Pharisees, we have understood what kind of "scandal" Christ wanted to trigger. Not towards perdition, but towards building up. Towards making us wiser, and not towards deceiving us. Towards enlightenment and not towards confusion. To us the strange reactions of Christ in from of the sinners (and not less strange reproaches addressed to the "righteous" ones, His always surprising behaviors and answers, ceaselessly opposing those ones which we would expect from Him), they are not a stone of stumble, but they are a concrete way of solving the great problems of the life. To us, far from determining us to deviate from the straight road, the so called scandal upholds us and guides us; it is to us the right-path, that of the metanoia which, by the help of our Savior, we are walking on and we won't stop walking on it full of trust and hope, *form scandal to scandal*, towards facing and destroying the eternal Pharisees living in the sound of the man ungifted with grace since the falling.

## THE PHANTOMS FROM THE FOG

(Matthew 18: 23-35)

We want to be forgiven, but we don't want to forgive ourselves. We want others to pay attention to us and all our rights and desires – if not even our caprices - to be observed, but we notice very quickly and in a scattered manner the needs, the asks from others. The others appear to us as being somewhere far, as some phantoms lost into fog.

It appears to us, actually, that all the people around us have obligations towards us, but we never are obliged to anyone. We deserve everything, everything we do is good and justified, and that only we are right for all the time. We don't even imagine that we could be wrong, or to have offended someone; it seems steadfastly imprinted in the deep tissues of our self a scale ceaselessly favoring us, as a compass needle constantly indicating the North Pole. The equivalent of a *pacemaker* meant not to regulate the heart's beatings but to strengthen our conviction that everything we do is good and infallible.

More than that: unhesitatingly and with the whole our heart we reckon all the people who are not identical to us as being insane. This proves as true the saying of Saint Anthony the Great: there will come the time when the people will become insane; each one will reckon that all the other people are insane. That time has already come or, better said, it has been present from the beginning, because of the man bearing in his nature the conviction that only within himself there coexist the harmony, the decency, the wisdom, the rationality, the justice, and that only him is the role-model of all normal customs, habits, and thinkings. Each *self* she/he reckons himself as the impeccable etalon of the correct behaviors: form the most important ones to the smallest ones. He doesn't eat, he doesn't drink, he doesn't wash himself, he doesn't think, he doesn't believe, he doesn't' speak exactly as I do – therefore he is insane; he is a furious madman and worthy of Gehenna.

Each *self* she/he thinks about herself/himself as being the center of the world. The most difficult thing is us to fulfill the advice of Christ, to give life to the capital urge: namely, we cannot get out of ourselves, we are unable to get out of ourselves and to look at us from outside us. Thus, this requirement is unremovable and unavoidable: we must be capable, at all costs, to look at ourselves form outside, to appreciate and judge on ourselves as we – ceaselessly, relentlessly, and in an undisturbed manner – we pursue and judge the people around us.

The astrophysics crossed along millennia through diverse phases: there have been succeeding the geocentrism, the heliocentrism, until now when we start understanding that the Planet Earth isn't but a medium size planet in a peripheral solar system of some galaxy, one of the numerous galaxies composing (seemingly) the millions of galaxies swarms belonging to the portion of cosmos which we can know for now. The human nature is predisposed to be even more limited that the heliocentrism or the geocentrism. The geocentrism is congenial to us, from where comes the vulgar but exact expression: to think of yourself as being the belly button of the earth. The consequences of this simple and logical conception: I have all the rights, I deserve everything, I have no obligation towards anybody, I owe nothing to anybody. Shortly speaking: I have only rights, and the people around me owe me everything. This epithalamus is a luciferin one, this self-standing hymn of the uncontrolled pride is rhythmed on a sole and very short choir: me, me, me…

The persevering advice of our Savior is totally different: *get out of yourself* meaning us to be able to look at ourselves with foreign eyes, from outside, objectively, in cold blood; it means our capacity of seeing ourselves and of reckoning ourselves (physically and axiologically) as one of the very many who surround us. We cannot reckon ourselves as "out of ourselves" but only on the moment when each "self" will have realized that isn't but a poor creature (resembling to the other around five billion and which swarm up in this planet) and she/he will have consummately renounced to reckon herself/himself as the only master and lord of it.

If there was specific to us and it united us a trait, then that would be just this so vivid tendency of centering the world and the universe upon us. The Germans use a very appropriate term to name it: *Ichhaftigkeit* (all-individualization), discerning within each of us the relentless desire for being reckoned as Caesar, for playing everywhere and in any circumstance our role as movie-star. Caesar, stardom.

But if we succeed to place ourselves (and to perceive ourselves) into our true situation of infima unit within an immense ensemble of fellow humans, we will give reality to *the others* too, and we will top recording them as an amorphous mass of phantasms lost in fog, steam, and clear-obscure. The *others* too will become to us as individualities, as *persons* (as, rightly so, the personalistic philosophy doesn't stop calling us), endowed as we are with own traits, with soul and with freedom, with rights, with requirements, with hopes, with aspirations, with pretentions, identically to us, and who look at us from outside us, and mercilessly, because of imagining – as we too do – that they

have only right and no duties, waiting from us a total conformity to their optics, to their mentality, and to their psychical and feeling coordinates.

The *Gospel*'s pericope form Matthew 18: 23-35 teaches us just that: not to believe that we are worthy of forgiveness, that only we are the ones having rights, while the others have only duties, as they are eternally indebted to us, ti4s into that state more tightly than the slave to the land which she/he is forced to labor on.

One must scatter the mist. It is our moral and Christian duty to get accustomed to look at ourselves, to judge and to know ourselves without lenience or bias, and to admit that others too have the status of free beings and they have equal right to ours. The *others* (as J.-P. Sartre like to say it) aren't some vague ectoplasmic concentrations, or some phantoms, or some Avogadro's numbers obeying only the rules of the statistics and of the big numbers: they are *equally real as we are*, and we owe them not less as they owe to us. It is difficult to us to think and to proceed like this, but we won't be able to accomplish anything steadfast, clean, and honest, as long as we aren't convinced that there *it isn't only me but they are too*, and that all of us enjoy the same rights and we have the same duties as well.

In the extensively read book published by doctor Moody, *Life after Life*, the man's soul in state of clinical death is shown as exiting the body and as looking from outside, form a certain height, at the body stretched on the bed or on a stretcher in the reanimation ward of the hospital. Lo the example which – without waiting for a clinical death – it would be as best as one can get us to follow it, lo the profoundly Christian action which we owe to show us capable of. While being alive, let's do ourselves too as the patients of doctor Moody did: let's get out of ourselves and let's look at ourselves attentively, without delusion, and with harshness, just as we look to somebody else, equally fiercely, unbiasedly, and mercilessly. We will get shocked! There will come to an end the sweet and deceiving dream of the self-compassion and of the self-content, and the demonical impulses towards the lust for power, the Nietzschean and Adlerian and Lorentzian instincts of supremacy of ours, of imperialism, and of aggression. The veils of the egocentrism will be removed from upon our eyes, veils impeding us from granting full reality and a regime of equality to those who belong to the same species as we do. We will remember than the wise Indian enunciation *tat tvam asi*: you too are this, the others aren't a different species, they are in the strictest, most biological, most scientific meaning of the term: you brothers, your congenial…

By examining ourselves, by tempting on ourselves from outside with unbribed eyes (as much as possible, of course, by anyway without lenience or

culpable complacency), we will be, each of us, our own judge on the Final Day, preparing us thus in the most appropriate manner for the true and general Final Judgment. Only by weighing on ourselves unbiasedly and mercilessly, and by daily – or at established intervals – proceeding to a personal and particular Final Judgment, we will be able to correct and better on ourselves and ewe will be able to present ourselves in front of the Right Judge having some good chances of being us forgiven and finding mercy. As long, though, as we reckon ourselves the center of the circle equally surrendering all of us, and as long as we don't understand that that Pascal-like circle has its origine within somebody else, we risk hearing us too: give him in the hands of the tormenters until he will pay the whole his debt. ("Until" meaning the eternity).

If we lock on ourselves up and if we grant right only to ourselves and if we spare on ourselves of any debts, we will be lost and worthy of the punishment meant to the egocentrism: the absolute loneliness. This is because vainly and uselessly will I shout out: me, me, me… This desperate call won't be heard by anybody and nobody will, therefore, answer it. Totally to no avail will ask for mercy the willingly lonely, the merciless lender, the fierce lawyer, when meeting his debtor. The merciless one will experience, as Shylock the merchant from Venice did, the hero of Shakespeare, the creditor who deceive on himself with blindly trusting only the law, until the law turned on him, and it taught him that every man needs understanding and mercy. (From God and form people). He will receive the answer given to them who killed their son and brother in order to rob him (they didn't recognize him after more than thirty years), the mother and the daughter form the book called *The Misunderstanding* by Albert Camus, or from the old man wearing a white beard form the upper floor of their inn (that old man actually symbolized the divinity): No! a *no* that is frozen, definitively distant, and stubborn like the flames of the hell are. Let's received the example of that one who owed ten thousand talents as a wonderful divine advice and as a stringent practical lesson of existential behavior.

Once more, through the text from Matthew 18: 23-35 it is proven that Christ preached us not so much a religion but a way of life, and let's be convinced that there is no other more useful and more pragmatic teaching on earth than that of Christ.

Let's get out of ourselves, let's look at ourselves unbiasedly and mercilessly, from outside us, let's scatter the fog from around us, and let's look at ourselves indiscriminately, let's leave the phantomatic world of the egocentrism in order us to enter the reality and the so much praised realism.

We don’t need to learn the realism. The realism is at the basis of the preaching of Christ. The Christianity, behold the realism!

**ABOUT THE MERCY**

Luke 7: 11-17

From the *Gospel*'s text from Luke 7: 11-17 I and reiterating the words: "And He felt mercy on her" and I am tarrying upon the word *mercy*. It is one of the most used terms in in the content of the *Holy Scripture* and especially in the *New Testament*, as also at the end of the *Holy Liturgy* and of all other religious services, constituting some kind of acoustic-ideational background or some kind of choir of all public and particular prayers, through the syntagm: "Lord, have mercy!". And isn't this vocable the foundation element of the *Heart's Prayer*, the most intimate, characteristic, and cherished prayer of the soul of the Orthodox Christian? Through the substantive *mercy* and through the verbal locution *to have mercy*, we enter, therefore, in unmediated contact with itself the core of our faith, with its most mysterious and most resistant to a facile explanation. Lo, here is the incandescent nucleus.

The mercy appears in *The Gospel of Saint Apostle Matthew*, at chapter no. 9, v. 7, 12, and 13: "Mercy I want and not sacrifice" and the shaking consequence of this declaration is that God places the mercy proven by the man on his fellow human even above the cult brought to Divinity (as also at the Final Judgment – Mt. 25: 31-47 – God will ask us only about our merciful deeds). At 15: 32 the Lord says: "I have mercy on the crowd", and at 20: 34: the text motivates the wonder done to the two blind men by invoking the same feeling: "And feeling mercy on them, Jesus touched their eyes and they immediately started seeing".

In the *Gospel according to Saint Mark*, the mercy is mentioned for several times:

Chapter 6, v. 34: "And getting out of the ship, Jesus saw a big crowd and He had mercy on them".

8: 2: "I have mercy on the crowd, for they have been here for three days waiting next to me and they have nothing to eat".

9: 22: "the father of the demonized child tells to the Lord: "if You can do something, help us, having mercy on us".

10: 47-48: the blind Bartimeus shouts out: "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me" and "Son of David, have mercy on me".

At 12: 33 (related to the texts from Matthew 9: 13 and 12: 7), though the word *mercy* is not mentioned explicitly, it is actually referred to: loving God with the whole your soul, with the whole your thought, and with the whole

your power, and loving your neighbor as on yourself, it is more than all the burnt sacrifices and more than all sacrifices.

At 18: 34 (the parable of the one owing ten thousand talents): “Wasn’t it appropriate that you too to have *mercy* on him who is a servant as you are, as I *had* mercy on you?”.

At 20: 34: “And having *mercy* on them, Jesus touched their eyes (of the two blind men) and they immediately started to see”.

In *The Gospel according to Saint Luke*:

At chapter no. 10, verse 33: “And a Samaritan man, passing on that road, he came to him and seeing him he had *mercy* on him”. And in the verse no. 37: “He who had *mercy* on him”.

At 7: 11-15 it is about the resurrection of the son of the widow from Nain – the pericope from today; the text shows us that the Lord commits the terrifying wonder because He had *mercy* on the widow who was leading her son to his burial.

At 15: 20 (regarding the profligate son): “And while he was still far, his son saw him and had *mercy* on him”.

At 17: 12-13: “Entering a village, ten lepper men who were sitting aside raised their voice and told Him: Jesus, Teacher, have *mercy* on us!”.

At 18: 38: “And him (the blind man from close to Gericho) shouted out: “Jesus, Son of David, have *mercy* on me!”.

We rightly can ask ourselves and strive to understand what does signify this expression so dear to the *Gospels* and to the Church, so usual and frequent in the daily Christian vocabulary.

First of all, one must not confound the mercy to the giving of alms (which is mentioned by the seventh *Blessing*, but there by saying “the merciful ones” it is probably that could understand not only the ones who give gifts to the poor but also those as the good Samaritan who had mercy on a stranger in need). The giving of alms I one of the forms which the mercy can take, but the mercy is infinitely higher, it comprises much more in her sphere and we guess it as shrouded in mysteries and more unpredictable in its exteriorizations than the simple material generosity which is an act of sharing material goods. The mercy is a felling, it is a virtuality, or, better said, it is a souly state or, more precise: it is a state of grace.

This feeling (using usual language), this impulse, this complex gift comprises, in variable dosages and impossible to be noticed by us, other numerous and most noble and most beautiful gifts: the kindness, the love, the friendship, the sensitiveness, the affection, the generosity, the brotherhood, the good will. But it is not confounded to any of those. It brings those together and

it exceeds them. And among all of those it is, doubtlessly, the hardest to explain and define. It is above anything, a sympathy, a compassion. And what do unveil these composing elements if not just the partaking, the capacity of getting out of yourself, of loving your neighbor not only as much as on yourself but even more than that, to substitute yourself to him, to feel and suffer yourself exactly as he does, to somewhat become one with him. The mercy, shortly speaking, it supposes the faculty of surpassing on yourself and of taking another's place, without judging him, not beyond good and bad as Nietzsche said, but beyond justice and condemnation and denying the harsh adage: "each man for himself".

Let's not think that to the Samaritan man it had been easy to proceed as he did. He too would have had his worries and preoccupations. It could have been very probable that he had been in a hurry, because of understanding a business trip, so that it had been a nuisance to stop in his way and to find the time for taking care of a gravely wounded man, one certainly unable to move on his own. The Samaritan man identified himself to the unknown to him man whose fate he took is upon himself; he not only helped the wounded man but he also sacrificed his own interests, his time, and his own troubles. The good Samaritan behaved as himself would have been beaten and robbed and remained invalid. Namely he suffered together with the other one.

Lo what the true mercy is, which, once again, it is not a simple giving of alms, but it means understanding the pain, the fear, the bitterness, and the grief of another; that means love and, before anything else, participation, partaking, the faculty of investing in another's situation, of leaving on yourself in order to become, for a certain while, another. (By using the dramaturgical Pirandello's terminology, couldn't we reckon it as a model – a pattern – of double personality?).

The mercy, a totally superior souly state, it actually is a divine-human feeling. (Don't the Scriptures tell us that its source is from God?). The mercy dwells in the intermediary space between sky and earth, there where the sentiment and the rationality are, the abstract and the concrete, the significant and the signification haven't been separated yet, in the totally ineffable and apophatic area where are combined traits as: the kindness, the love, the altruism, and the patience (for one needs patience for taking heed at another's sayings and complains), attention (for one need to pay attention, the hurried Samaritan man doesn't pass by in a hurry and without noticing the things happening around him), the sensitivity (the Samaritan man sees himself in the place of another, he judges, he decides, and he acts just like he would have been wounded), the living conscience of the brotherhood connecting us with

our neighbor during difficult moments, the sensitiveness of the conscience (that would have been constantly reproaching to the Samaritan man, that wouldn't have been allowing him anymore to live in peace, if he had searched for excuses by telling to himself that, well, he has not time to waste, that there will be find somebody to take care of this poor man, somebody who would not be in such a hurry as he is, and that he, of course, if very sorry for the entire situation but he cannot leave his businesses and consecrate to the wounded man God know how much time, and there had been also the possibility to get into all sorts of troubles and expenses: bandage him, transport him, find him a shelter, a care, and the costs could have been very high… And, whether he dies? If the wounded man died when he was approaching him, or while he was handling him, wouldn't him be blamed for his death? The priest and the Levite have mercy on him too, but they were also wise, so, haven't they shown me what I actually should do?).

To these voices of the odious inward sense, of the sapient and temperate egotism, the Samaritan man didn't lean his ear. There won the man endowed with ghost.

The mercy had by our Savior on the crow unfed by three days, on the blind men, on the widow from Nain, or on the man with palsy from Bethesda bath (that one being healed without asking for it) it is powerful proof of His perfect embodiment and, in the same time, of the communication of the natures, for it was manifested as a feature having a double origin: divine and human. One doesn't bestow the mercy due to some merits (of the ascetic), neither as a reward for fulfilling some contractual obligations (as reckon the religions which have as preponderant the law and the covenant). Neither the notion of merit nor that of contract can contribute to contouring the much more complex and much more difficult idea of the mercy. This is rather a consequence of the conception according to which the man-God relation is better expressed by the connection between the man-person and God-Person (reckoned by Father Dumitru Stăniloae as the essence of the Christian faith). The mercy, rightly so, it supposes such a personal relationship, it is a feeling, it is a disposition, it is a "state" that cannot occur but within that being capable of understanding another being, of substituting that being, of participating to that being's pain not from outside but form a perspective identical to that of the one who suffers. The mercy is, of course, a getting out of oneself, an operation recommended by Christ to His disciples, to His believers, to His listeners, and to His interlocutors. The mercy isn't either rational or irrational, either purely human strength or purely divine (it comes from above but it boils within the embodied soul) and it is not confounded to affectivity or to mutual

collaboration. It corollary means helping the neighbor but not on the ground of the reciprocity (which is an inferior ethical stage), neither of the solidarity (a superior ethical stage); it comes out of graver and more covered regions of the human being, from unapparent aptitudes in the psychic-physical totality of the man and, as it seems probably, it is not inscribed in the human being's genetical code. It is, in the frame of the corporality, of the physiology, and even of the human psychic, a surprise, it is a second effect.

The grace of the mercy surpasses even what we usually call as "good and beautiful sentiments". We owe to cultivate those ones, they are very good, but they still don't reach the level of the mysterious psychical phenomenon called as mercy. Neither do the virtue and the righteousness. The virtue remains within the frame of the habits useful to the one who respects it and who puts it in work, a laudable fact, but also *towards his good*. The righteousness, as holy and majestical as it is, it has its place next to laws, determinisms, causalities: all of these specific to the inorganic and inanimate world. The righteousness is logical, it is mathematical, it is quantitative, and it is rational. The mercy is from other realms, and it is kindred to the uncreated Light, to the mystery, to the non-cognoscible attributes of the divinity, to the divine energies and to the impenetrable deeps of the human nature which there dwells a trace of divine breath. It doesn't belong to the predictable categories of the causal and syllogistical logics, and it belongs to another world. It transcends the justice and it even defied the justice, it dares not to pay attention neither to justice nor to the practical of theoretical rationality. The Lord by saying: "be merciful as your Father merciful is", He affirms the mercy as being beyond the world's limits, and the people, by impropriating it, by dressing themselves up in it, those people actually are being deified, namely they expose their divine origin.

The mercy is the opposite to accountancy; the accountancy is demon's job. That one constantly calculates, weighs in, doesn't forgive, doesn't erase, doesn't forget anything. The merciful Christ – *Whom belongs to have mercy on us* - with a sole word and at once annuls the sins of an entire life: of the sinful woman, of the woman committing adultery, of Zaccheus the publican, of the good thief. The accountancy, the true calculating machine, it is mechanical, it is relentless, it is dreadful; once in an accountancy register one cannot modify even one figure. Everything is petrified forever. The mercy is the opposite to accountancy, it is always ready to forget, to forgive, to exonerate, to overlook. Out of the tight (and terrible) gearbox of the laws, of the justice, and of the determinism, only the mercy – like the light of a lighthouse to a shipwreck, like the gentle light of a country house to a strayed traveler – it can signify the hope and it can remove the apprehension of the irremediable.

The man who has mercy on his brother, on his neighbor, or on a stranger and unknow to him person, he will expose his quality of son of the Heavenly Father, and thus he will make questionable his primate-like origin. And he will seem to tell to the world and to the nature: I don't belong only to you, though I have been born within you and according to your laws, I am free to contradict you and to do totally different from the way you could have predicted, not as a rival, not as a competitor, an indifferent one, an enemy of my congenital one, but as a friend, as a devotee, as a trustworthy allied, as a good brother of him. I therefore am contradicting you, and I am confronting you, and I am laughing at all your forces which reckon me as a creature integrally submitted to the egocentrism and guided only by the biological principle of the struggle for life. I am not only bearing my cross, lo that I am even assuming it – at least temporarily – an also I am assuming the cross of my fellow human, I am carrying it as Simon from Cyrene did for the condemned Jesus. Not out to his own initiative, that's right (would have the authorities allowed that substitution to be done willingly by Simon?), but because the Pharisees and the Sadducees hurried up to finish the job before the beginning of the Sabbath, and because the condemned One fell for a few times under the weight of the torture tool; still, He bore it. Truly merciful would have been a Simon of Cyrene, or Veronica who was merciful by her nature and because she couldn't do anything else she at least wiped the sweat form on the holy face of the condemned: *As many into Christ have been baptized, in His mercy you have been dressed up*.

In mercy merge diverse (and opposite) features of the man: the courage and the gentleness, the urge and the patience, the undignified revolt and the tenderness. In the same time, the merciful is a wandering knight rooming the world in order to correct the injustices and the violations, and he is also a nurse-monk in a leprosy hospital. This is because any man struck by his fate is some sort of lepper. He eventually inspires a fugitive compassion, but also, of course, dread: the misfortune is reckoned as contagious, and the misfortunate is reckoned as a source (be it even involuntarily) of asks, namely of troubles, against which it is more sapient one to place a wall of defending indifference between them and him, passing (as the priest and as the Levite) as far and as quickly as possible.

So diverse is the mercy on the world, on the customs, and of the brass laws, so that they most often cause not only the bad misunderstanding and the hostility, if not also the contempt, the mockery, the sarcasm. Any merciful person is, to some extent, a Don Quixote triggering the laughter and the bewilderment. But what were the Spanish people calling the crazy old man

reader of knightly novels, riding a poor mare, bragging with a rusty spear and wearing a helmet made of a shaving bowl, and who started to wander the wide world in order to straighten the injustices, in order to put an end to the violations, and who actually fought the wings of the windmills and the flocks which he thought they were the armies of Alifanfaron? They call him *El Nuestro Señor Don Quijote El Cristo Español*! And how did Dostoyevsky avenge the kind, the gentle, and the merciful prince Miskin, nicknamed as the Idiot by all the smart people around him? By calling his novel right that: *The Idiot*, and by transforming that worthless nickname in a glory title for eternity.

And it is a believable fact that our Lord stirred up the hatred of the Sadducees and of the Roman and that He was dressed up in a liar purple and crowned with thorns not only because He was affirming that He and the Father are one, but also because of all His deeds of mercy, of forgiveness, and of compassion. Not only because of calling Himself as Son of God but also because He called on Himself 0 and He behaved accordingly – as the Son of Man. This brotherhood, this cohesion with the oppressed and unclean ones, this total bestowing of Himself to the others, this intimacy with the sick and troubled might have upset even more strongly than the proclamation of His godlike origin. Nothing seems more scandalous to us, nothing confuses us and makes us more fiercely than the spectacle of the gratuitous kindness, of the individual able to commit that what – on moral plan- we could do it too.

Asked about which quality of the free ad thinking being seems to me as especially characteristic, I won't hesitate answering: the mercy. That's why I am not surprised by the fact that the most read, recited, and invoke psalm – the Psalm no. 50[35], of the repentance – the first verse sound like this: *Have mercy on me, God, according to Your great mercy*, and that in one of the most frequently uttered Christian prayers we find: *Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy on us, Lord, because we don't know any answer, so that we bring to You this prayer, we, Your sinner servants, have mercy on us.*

What most valuable thing – and how more decently – could we ask for, what could make us more aware of the wickedness of our human condition, than unavoidably needing us the mercy of our Lord? Not the justice (which the psalmist liked to refer maybe too much to – though he didn't forget mentioning the mercy either), only this last one, only the mercy can guarantee us our hope for deliverance, and the same mercy, here on this temporary earth, it can be the most efficient and the most coherent ground for our relationships with the others. To Christianity the mercy if soul out of its soul. On horizontal plan the

[35] In KJB we have Psalm no. 51. (E. l. t.'s n.)

mercy is a practice towards your neighbor in suffering. On vertical plan the Christian asks God for mercy with the whole virtue of his heart and of his thought. What else can more surely wake us up out of the nightmare of a world where everyone seems to strive for proving the fierce saying of Sartre: The others? Lo the hell!

## HOLY PEOPLE AND BELOVED PEOPLE

1. Our father Abraham, the merciful one, because of daring to haggle with God and because of not being ashamed of insisting – the scene recounted in the 18th chapter of the book of *Genesis* (the verses 23-33) it could be the most emotional from the entire content of *The Old Testament*. When God spoke to Moses there were thunders and lightenings and a thick cloud and a very strong trumpets-like sound. And when God spoke to Elijah there was a smooth breeze. But God seems to have a counsel with Abraham. One would say that they are two relatives talking over a glass of wine, in the shade of the backyard walnut tree, and they are in no hurry to conclude their deal. "There may be in that city fifty righteous ones… or there may be only forty-five of them… or only forty… or only then…". It is in this *descrescendo* (numerical – actually it is a admirable and amazingly daring *crescendo* of mercy and of love for fellow humans and lenience for the man's sinfulness) so much courage, so much tirelessness and tenacity and persevering power, so that the reader of this text cannot but feel the pride of being himself a man too, his eyes getting wet with the tears of the holy joy. And it is not excluded at all to him to hear sounding in his mind the words uttered during our time by Raymond Aron: "In the presence of your greatness I respectfully shiver".

The deal is concluded at the figure ten. But to what avail? The people from Sodom and Gomorrah don't know about that, as neither the indifferent by passers from the Skull Hill thought that the condemned one was suffering *for them*.

2. Saint Hierarch Nicholas who, together with Saint Cassian the Roman, they in a hurry and dressed up in shiny clothes go towards the meeting place where they are to meet God. On the road, a peasant's cart got deeply stuck in the mud. Saint Nicholas seems to want helping the man in trouble. Cassian rebukes him: we cannot be late, God forbid that, or to show ourselves covered in mud in front of the Lord! It would be so, it is so, Saint Nicholas approves agrees Cassian, but neither can we leave this man in trouble and pass by him as the priest and the Levite from the parable with the good Samaritan. And talking no more, Saint Nicholas strives, swats, gets covered in mud, gets tired, and his clothes got torn… And, finally, that cart is pulled out of that mud and its owner gets in his way, while blessing his benefactor. During all this time Saint Cassian looks at what is happening, and after a while he leaves in a great hurry.

Saint Cassian arrives first to the meeting and he is waiting for a long time (as on burning coals) until Saint Nocholas finally arrives gasping for air

and dirty all over. Saint Cassian is amazed and a little scandalized as well. But what thew Almighty does then? He receives Saint Cassian with a glacial politeness, while He receives Saint Nicholas with a great friendship. And He talks to them like this: your name, you the immaculate one and the right-on-time one and the respectful one will be borne by one in ten thousand people – and more! – and you will be celebrated once in every four years. But your name, you the dirty, unpunctual, unreliable, but worthy servant of your neighbor and true disciple of My much-compassionate Son, your name will be among the most popular names from the whole world.

The meaning of this story is that Saint Nicholas wasn't late. More than that. He arrived before Cassian did. This is for on that very moment when he chose to help his neighbor he stood in front of God. On this way we too can get close to God, by us doing the good; than He grants us audience (He hears our prayers). It wasn't needed the physical presence of the hierarch for, by his deed, he surpasses his companion and he crossed the distances at a thought-speed.

On this earth, the surest means for entering the communication (the communion) with the Almighty, the unmistaken and instantaneous means for that, it is the doing of the good, the helping of our neighbor who is in trouble.

3. I love much Saint Seraphim of Sarov for he understood that the first duty of the Christian is that of being happy. The frown, angry, whimsical type is not a true Christian (one who really receives the good news) regardless how many prostrations he would do or how many candles he will burn.

Saint Seraphim didn't use to call the people whom he was coming across to, with the appellatives: "milord" or "brother" or "your piousness", but he only used to call them "my happiness". His basic slogan was "rejoice yourselves". And when he entered the cemetery of his monastery (or any other place) he used to shout out: Christ has resurrected! And the death ones, always, answered appropriately and in a choir: Christ has truly resurrected!".

4. I venerate Saint John Nepomuk for, as confessor of Queen of Bohemia, he refused to unveil to the king (who had serious suspicions regarding the honor of his wife) the mystery of the received confession. The menaces of the king proved to be useless. The saint was menaced with the death; he defamed these threats as some garbage. He held up tight, he didn't obey, he only obeyed his duty as priest-confessor: not to unveil to anyone, under any motif, the secret he was entrusted during the confession. The king did what he promised: he ordered the stubborn to be thrown into the water of Vltava River, so that the blessed saint received his martyrdom and proved himself being a true servant of Christ and a worthy priest of the Church founded by Him.

5. I admire Archbishop Dionysus-August Affre and I respect him so much that I never lose the occasion for referring enthusiastically to him. During the grave social incident taking place in Paris, in June 1848, he went in the streets as he was dressed up in his hierarchical vestments, leaving the Notre Dame Cathedral, in order to try and put an end to the fratricide fights. In the city's streets were raised barricades; on one of these, while urging the fighters to peace, he was hit by a bullet and mortally wounded: "The good shepherd puts his life for his sheep" (JN. 10: 11).

Affre is buried right inside the Cathedral and there, when I was in Paris, I used to go and worship the memory of the priest who too seriously the words of his Teacher and who didn't leave his flock in danger. He could have remained inside the Cathedral and continuing his worshipping, praying for peace. But he realized that, during those moments, his duty needed him outside, among barricades, in dangerous places, and next to his sheep. Remaining inside the cult place would have been equivalent to running away from the wolf, to forsake his sheep, and to confess that he didn't care of their fate. There is a time for meditation, for prayer, and for officiation; there is a time for confrontation, for fight, and for risk, for *thronging*. Into truth, Affre gave life – by his death – to Christ's words.

Another particularity of Affre's case is the urgency. He doesn't meditate upon it for too long, he doesn't prepare himself at all for it. He listens to the call of the bullet's' whistling *immediately*, as Simon, ads Andrew, as John, as James, and as Levi listened to the Lord's calling, and, *by leaving everything*, he goes out of the Cathedral. *Il est allé au canon*, as the French military use to say, unlike Maréchal de Grouchy who hesitated for a long time, and who didn't' applied this capital principle and thus he largely contributed to the loss of the Waterloo battle. Affre, on the opposite, he immediately entered the action, he went there where the noise of the battle was raging, so that he proved himself to be not only a saint but also a soldier, a valiant mousquetaire, *a good soldier* of Christ.

6. Though lacking dramatism, especially beautiful and emotional seems to us the behavior of the Metropolitan of Moldavia: Iacov II Stamati. He was having the dinner with the honored boyars of the country and, of course, he was sitting in the place of honor at the table. He had been announced that a woman arrived and she wanted to see him. The metropolitan ordered to be that woman shown in. The boyars wondered much seeing that the poor peasant woman, barefoot, was invited by the metropolitan to sit on his hierarchical throne.

The poor barefoot peasant woman was the metropolitan's mother and he observed and he translated in life a text of the *Holy Scripture*: the fifth commandment.

7. Powerful, exemplary, wonderful, and very useful it seems to me the case remembered in Synaxarion on 13th of June: it is that of the Martyr Crescent from Mira of Lechia. Invited with benevolence – and not without a certain friendship – by the governor to "formally" bring sacrifice to the idols in order him to escape with his life, he rejected that advice by showing that he doesn't understand what the word "formally" means. The body, as he explains to the insistent governor, cannot go there where the soul goes. Crescent didn't "formally" sacrifice and – faithful to himself and to his Master – he died without defiling himself through an act which wouldn't have been but an odious and ridiculous trick.

This example is good for all times and it constitutes a categorical answer given to the worthless advocates of the solution of "formally" committing any sorts of offense. The form, in this world, it cannot be separated from content. After we have signed *a paper* or after we have brought sacrifices to the idols, the form and the content will have been welded together so that no power will be able to discern between them.

8. I admire at Saint Basil the Great – known for the austerity of his life and of his doctrine – the exception he made in favor of a sinful woman who was so ashamed of her deeds than he didn't dare to come and orally confess her sins, according to the canons. She forwarded to him a letter which she wrote down her embarrassing confession.

It would have been naturally her request to be dismissed, and her to be asked for voicing up, face to face, her guilt. But Saint Basil not only accepted that totally unusual way of confessing the sins but he even absolved that woman and, praying for her, he obtained her forgiveness.

Basil also did a deed worthy of all praise and admiration: he asked God to prolong his life as much as needed in order to baptize the Jew Ioasaf and his whole house. His ask was accepted.

9. I have a great piousness for Abbot Zosimus, who is but a literary character and a creation of Dostoyevsky in *Karamazov Brothers*, but who was conceived with so much sincerity, non-conformism, and strength, so that he seems more alive than the so-called living who – as François Mauriac said – are but cadavers carried away by the gloomy water of the life. Zosimus is the opposite to all bigotries, narrowness, and nonsenses. All of those who confound the spiritual life to the draught and who confound the monasticism to bitterness and to dirty, they should think at him. Dostoyevsky opposed him

Terapont, the false ascetic and parade-saint, in order to teach us to cherish not the stupid excesses and the nonsensical bizarreries, but the true Christian virtues: the freedom, the joy, the love, the simplicity, the discretion, the humbleness.

Zosimus is a literary creation, but how alive was the genius Christian who imagined him (seemingly, according to a real role-model), and who bestowed Zosimus to us with unhesitating generosity, towards strengthening our soul and towards shunning the apparent pious hypocrisy of Terapont. The earth if full of Terapont and Tartuffe like people, while Zosimus, sadly, if among the few chosen ones.

10. What was preaching the Blessed Theresa of Lisieux? That we owe to pay attention especially to the small things, to the daily paraphernalia, to the insignificant. There, in the grinding, in the monotony, and in the abrasive tiredness of the simple life it is verified and proved the faith, there the fellow human knows who can be called as his *neighbor*. The great acts of heroism and of martyrdom, to most of the people, they are improbable. But the gentleness, the patience, the politeness, the good will, the self-control, they are available to anybody at any time. If is useless to us to dream of ourselves as committing unparalleled valiant deeds and sacrifice; it is useful and expiatory to us paying attention to the small things and to constantly behave in a noble manner, peacefully, and patiently.

11. Regarding Saint Anton of Padova, so loved by Catholics, many people like speaking about him condescendingly and ironically. The saint who finds your lost keys and your lost puppy!

How much blindness and hurried evilness in this way of judging him! The Catholic theologians specify that Saint Anton doesn't help those who have lost certain objects but he helps those who have lost their faith, their virtue, and their hope…

I don't deny that, but I don't shy admiring Saint Anton of Padova also as a protector of the humble people in trouble and also as help for finding some things which in certain circumstances and to certain people (old, sick, lonely, persecuted) can have an overwhelming importance. Losing the house keys, what a torment and a trouble is to him who is a poor and old person, to a paralytic, or to a helpless one… Losing the beloved dog to the man lacking any friend, what an unhappiness that is! There are non-great, non-tragical pains, there are ridiculous disasters, there are nagging troubles and ailments which do not kill but they poison the life of that persons who suffer from them. Shouldn't us take in account those ones too?

In his infinite kindness, Saint Anton isn't ashamed of coming to their help immediately. That is an act of courage, for it implies to defy the stupidity and the indifference in front of very real sufferings, though those sufferings lacking greatness.

The good, the modest, the caring Saint Anton!

12. I bear a special veneration to Saint Evangelist Mark for in the *Gospel according to Mark* (chapter no. 9, verses 14-29) it is reiterated in details the healing of the lunatic child and there is the syntagm (v. 24): "I believe Lord! Help my faithlessness!" which I reckon it as being the foundation of the Christian faith and the paradoxical-dialectical explanation of the this most disturbing among all facts: the act of faith.

Hos can the father believe while he reckons himself as unbeliever? Are not the words – "help my faithlessness" – the irrefutable proof of his disbelief? No, the father (namely the man) can reach his faith for: 1) he calls the Lord to his help, 2) shouting out, 3) with tears. In this way the "critical point" of the disbelief is surpassed and the disbelief becomes – shakingly – faith.

13. The good thief.

Why was he found worthy of being together with the Lord, on the same day, in Paradise?

For, while being on the cross in pains, he was able to be compassionate to the lord! He had, he the misfortunate, the time, the w8ill, and the kindness to think at another's pain.

The Lord, on the cross, He prayed for those who crucified Him. The thief, on the cross, he found within himself the generosity of deploring the injustice done to an innocent man.

This extraordinary altruistic gesture was rewarded by the Lord accordingly: He made of Saint Dismas the first citizen of the regained Paradise!

14. Allow me to insert among the Christian saints and writers a Jew one, a "Hassidic" from the school of Baal Shem Tov, that one who in the XVIII Century in Poland though and lived closer to the Christian conceptuality than any other Jewish sect since the Essenes.

Rabbi Nahman from Vratislav said: It is easy to the man to renounce to the essential things of the life, but not to its little sweets. The man needs these ones, even in small quantities.

15. The case of Saint Mary the Egyptian is – as also the case of Saint Anthony the Great who, also being an Egyptian, he had to face great temptations – eloquent. Passionately debauched, and not for money, she spent after her miraculous conversion forty-seven years into wilderness. When, haphazardly, after those years passed, she was encountered by priest Zosimus,

he though he didn't see a human being. After he received her confession, he asked her: are you still bothered by bodily temptations? Her unexpected answer was: they fight me like some wild beasts.

Yes, the ghost is zealous but the body is helpless. Still, in her case, the ghost was victorious.

This recount, cruel and realistic, I like it just because of its totally unexemplary character – non-"edifying" (the barbarism of it is clear to me), lacking that fragrance of facile and false moralism which is present in many hagiographies. The true wonder is not the sudden healing of passions, but it is the power for fighting for forty-seven years, and this is a victory obtained so bitterly and terrifyingly.

The virtue didn't fall to Mary the Egyptian from the sky. Such a case would have been unworthy of Christ and of His martyr.

Lo the true Christian, for adults, one differing form the little stories good for them who drink milk and who can hear only sweet things. The passionate who have been gifted with the grace of the repentance, they would better read the life of Mary the Egyptian, written by Patriarch Sophrony of Jerusalem, in order they to know what narrow and stony path Christ allows them to walk on. But also, all the Christians: let them know clearly what the defeat, what the unseen war, and what the martyrdom really mean.

16. Maximilian Kolbe, the Polish priest who offered himself to take the place of a worker who was father of four children, when, after an escape from a concentration camp, the SS guards decide to decimate the detainees. Kolbe was next to that man whom the number ten fell on.

So, he took that man's place (the leadership of the concentration camp didn't care about the victims' identity, but only about their number). And what death was the priest taken to, together with all the other condemned ones? Not to being shot or hung, but they were forsaken in an empty mine to die of thirst and hunger. And the guards even forced the condemned ones to walk towards the mind singing.

Eugen Ionescu said: No one on this earth has had a happier fate than Kolbe's.

17. I admire the Martyr Nicolae Oprea also known as Oprea Miclaus from Salistea of Sibiu, for how much perseverance, patience, tirelessness, and fearlessness he proved.

He went – as a simple layman, a poor peasant – for three times to Vienna, in order to defend the Orthodoxy; he confronted, as nobody else did it, the terrific Habsburg bureaucracy.

He answered courageously and calmly and wisely during the investigations which he was submitted to. We don't even know whether he dies in the lugubrious dungeon from Kufstein or he escaped from that prison and he died who knows where, disregarded by everybody, as one of those heroes who in the eyes of the Almighty compensate, I believe, for the indifference, for the fear, for the haughtiness, or for the comfort of many of the great personalities of this world.

18. I admire Iosif Gheorghian, who was for two times Metropolitan of Hungaria-Vlahia, for the fact (amazing) that by the cleanliness of his life, by the care he had for his daily Christian behavior, for the sincerity of his piousness and for the kindness he showed to the people around him, he stirred up – only him, the only one among all the monastic and priestly orders – the conquered admiration and the unhesitating crushed affection – of the former monk Tudor Arghezi. And that's not an easy thing!

19. I admire Katow from *La condition humaine* of André Malraux.

During the Chinese-Japanese war, form the '30, the prisoners were thrown by Japanese into the boiling tanks of the locomotives. Katow owned a cyanide capsule. But he handed over that cyanide capsule to other two people who were captured together with him.

Problem: is his deed an urge to complicity to suicide, as a shouting to the skies sin?

Answer: yes, it is.

Question: so, will all the three ones be condemned as the Final Judgment?

Answer: I don't think so. I think differently. I think that the Lord will tell to the devils: yes, the two who committed suicide are yours, and such is also the one who facilitated them to commit suicide so that he is an accomplice. But – in the virtue of My blood shed on the cross for the salvation of the world, and in the virtue of the word: "I have given all the power in heavens and on earth", lo that I am commanding my faithful servant Archangel Michael to come here and throw his sword on that side of the scale where these unfortunates are. So, they will escape the hell. And on Katow, in the virtue of the same almightiness given to Me, I am inviting Him to the Imperial Dinner where, this night, he will be given an honorable place so that, I will see him and I will talk to him.

And then, towards the devils: don't be sad for losing three souls, because you will have all the souls of those ones who were throwing their prisoners into the boiling tanks.

20. Noble and emotional is the figure of the Anglican Pastor Arthur Shearly Cripps (who was also an important poet). In the South-African *veldt*

where he had been working as a missionary, he never consented to walk but as his parishioners did, namely barefoot, and he lived in a hut and he ate what they ate: some boiled vegetables.

21. Who doesn't' know Bishop Myriel, the hero of Victor Hugo in *Les Misérables*, the man who changed the soul of the fugitive prisoner Jean Laljean? After being accommodated into the modest parish house (because Myriel made of the episcopal palace a house for the homeless and the hospital), Valjean runs away stealing the silver candlesticks from the fireplace's mantle, the only valuable object from the entire house. He was caught by gendarmes and brought back to the bishop, so that the candlesticks to be identify and Valjean condemned. But Myriel told them: you are wrong, good people and zealous defenders of the holy law, I have bestowed those candlesticks to him.

In our Synaxarion is given a similar story: of that landowner who helped the thieves to put on their backs the sacks full of grains stolen by them from his barns.

22. From the Occidental Christian literature, there are also three more admirable figures: the Prist (unnamed), the hero of the book *The Diary of a Country Priest*, by George Bernanos, Father Francis Chisholm from *The Keys of the Kingdom*, by A. J. Cronin, and the Priest (also anonymous) from *The Power and the Glory*, by Graham Greene.

They are characterized by the fact that they don't know, they don't realize, they don't suspect at all that they are close to holiness. At them as at Zosimus as well: absolute sincerity, simplicity, humbleness, and the solution of assuming (always) the guilt.

Unforgettable, in the book of Cronin, is that scene where the priest let the Chinese man know (whose son he healed of a grave illness) that isn't mandatorily needed that, as mandatory thanksgiving, the child to be baptized (the healings aren't paid, and the mandatory Baptism is null)[36].

The Priest of Bernanos (the whole book is entirely beauty, gravity, pain, grace, and humbleness) fulfills his mission being himself sick with an incurable illness (intestinal cancer); he fulfills his mission with a steadfastness and with a naturalness as we rightly can expect from the first disciples of the Lord. He rebukes only on himself, he searches daily for his improvement, and he doesn't' lack his humor, his lenience for others, and an acute sense of the relativity of the worldly things.

[36] Cardinal J. M. Lustiger: The faith wants to tell you to accept to be chosen by God; it doesn't want to tell you to chose God… Becoming a Christian doesn't mean embracing Christ's religion, it means becoming Christ's brother…. Becoming a Christian doesn't mean embracing Christ's religion, it means becoming, yourself, Christ.

The anonymous Priest from *The Power and the Glody* is a drunkard, a sinner, a coward, an unworthy, and a defiled one. But he is persecuted and mercilessly and tirelessly searched for by them who want to kill him. And, despite of being full of sins, he doesn't allow the big sin of desperation to conquer his soul. He doesn't despair. He doesn't despair and he also knows that the only truly important thing in this world is that of being a saint.

He doesn't despair because of being persecuted and he is convinced that the holiness is the only natural goal of the man. Please allow me to tell you that I love this unworthy and unhappy priest.

23. In one of his avatars Buddha was a rabbit. A brahman visited him. Because of not having anything to give to that brahman, he thrown himself in the fire. So that the honored guest to have something to eat.

24. Saint Carol Bartholomew and Michel Euquem of Montaigne lived around the same time (the first one between 1538-1584, the another between 1533-1592), and they were: one archbishop of Milan and the second one mayor of Bordeaux. When, again at close dates the plague erupted into the two cities, Carol Bartholomew quickly *returned* to Milan; Montaigne, instead, he immediately *left* the contaminated harbor.

I don't even think at issuing some reckless critique addressed to the great and famous skeptic writer. But I cannot but to compare the two modes of behavior and to ascertain that the "fanatics" are sometimes those who have stronger nerves, who are more experienced, and who have a more acute 'sense of duty" than the "strong spirits" (as the French call them; we call them: free thinkers).

25. The ecumenical Patriarch Athenagoras, the man of the kiss from Jerusalem, he told Oliver Clément that he loved the freedom above all and that he goes towards Christ Who is love.

In these two it is comprised and it is summarized the teaching of Christ. There cannot be faith in their absence.

Christ's testament: Faith, Freedom, Love.

## BESTOWING YOU WILL ACHIEVE

Blind, stupid, and narrow in mind, as I am, I still hasn't been so stupid or so nescience that I to believe that Christ asks us for giving away our abundance: that is being done by the pagans as well. But I have been enough unskilled and wandering into darkness to think – and that seems totally conform to the Christian teaching – that we are asked for giving away our few. And I have even gone all the way to accept the idea that out of the parable with the two pennies thrown by the widow woman into the box of the gifts (Mk. 12: 41-44; Lk. 21: 1-4) it turns out that we must give away everything we have, the whole our wealth.

I needed to haphazardly read, some time ago now, a text of the French poet Henri Michaux (1899-1988) in order I to understand, shaking and shivering, that Christ asks from us something totally different. Namely, that what we don't have.

Blind, stupid, narrow in mind, that I was. And chained into the chains of the most lamentable common sense. How could I imagine that Chris-God Who accepted to embody Himself and to die on the cross, like the most unfortunate and wicked among mortals, He will ask us for giving out of our abundance or from the fewness of our wealth or even to give the whole our wealth? How could He call us to such simple actions belonging to this world, namely possible actions! Didn't Paul Claudel define God attributing Him the saying: why are your fearing? I am the impossible that looks at you.

Christ, therefore, He asks us for right this: the impossible; us to give that what we don't have.

But let's listen to Michaux: a candidate to monasticism presents himself to the monastery where he would want to be admitted in. He confesses to the abbot: you know, father, I don't have either faith or light, either essence or courage, either trust in myself and I cannot be of help to myself, and all the less to others; I have nothing.

It naturally would have been him to immediately be rejected. But the things hadn't been like that. The abbot answered him: it doesn't matter! You don't have faith, you don't have light; by giving them to others you will have those too. Searching for them for others, you will achieve them for yourself. You owe to help this brother, your neighbor and your fellow human, with that what you don't have. Go! Your monastic cell is in this corridor, the third door on the right.

Not out of your abundance, not out of your fewness, but out of your lack, out of that what you don't have. Bestowing to another that what you don't have – faith, light, trust, hope – you too will achieve those.

"You must help with that what you don't have".

"Giving that what you don't have, you too, the empty, the deserted, you too will achieve the things which you don't have".

"With that what you think you don't have, but it is, that will be within you. Deeper than the deep of your own self. More secret, more shrouded, more limpid, a spring gushing up like a torrent circulating without stopping, calling, inviting to partaking".

Yes, only thus could a servant of Christ speak, a servant of the mysterious One: *paradoxically* (as He always taught us: if you want to rule, serve; if you want to be extolled, humble yourself; if you want to save your soul, lose it for Me; if you want to regain your innocence, admit your guilt) and *bewildering* (if you give that what you don't have you too will achieve that what you have given to others).

Except the *Gospels*, I don't think that there is another text speaking more plainly and more Christianly than the small poem of Michaux which stirred up my stupefaction and my enthusiasm. There could be similar texts in *Karamazov Brothers* and in *The Demons*, maybe at Cervantes creating *El Nuestro Señor Don Quixote, El Christo Español*, maybe at Albert Camus in the text about Oscar Wilde (*The Artist in Prison*) and about walking towards Christ not by suffering and pain (which is a good way, but still an inferior way), but by excess of happiness and euphorically (which is a superior way). I don't think that everywhere else another poet or prose writer spoke closer about the unapproachable One.

By giving that what we don't' have, we will achieve by ricochet that what – with unparalleled daring – we dared to give to another. This lesson is valid for any Christian, clergyman, or layman. And especially to the monk. Let him not to worry, let him not to be scared, let him not to be restless that monk whom feels is inside empty, and who is haunted by mistrust and by weakness, engulfed by darkness and drought. Let him not take heed at all at all of those. Temptations of the hopelessness, wicked tricks of the evil and dry one. Let him give to those who come to visit him – in his monastic cell, in the monastery's garden, on the porch of the xenodochium, at the altar's door – to find faith, strengthening, light, and a little hope – that what they expect from him and that what he knows very well that on that very moment it could happen that he won't have. Let him give then those. And, by giving them those, those things

will stretch upon himself too, and he too will receive alms out of the alms he has given to another.

"By giving the light that you don't have, you too will have it".

Could the Michaux's words clarify in deep for us the text form Matthew 25 about the Fearsome Judgment? Could the good ones have given to the thirsty out of that water which they too had been thirsty for; to the hungry the food they hadn't had, to the naked the coat they too had craved for?...

The secret of the monastic life seems to be: to dare giving that what you temporarily happen not to have it. But lo also the amazing promise: by giving that what you don't have, you will achieve that what you had known how to give out of the void of your being. The supra-natural gift is reflected upon yourself, it turns back to yourself like a boomerang, as a yar of light reflected in a mirror – and it will enrich you, it will accomplish you, it will overwhelm you!

Of course. There couldn't have been differently! How could I have been thinking even for an instant – let aside for years – that Christ wants us to give out of what we have: out of abundance, out of fewness, out of everything! Big deal, lousy job! Too human, too poor, too petty job! We are asked for something else: for that that seems impossible to us.

We are being promised something else: that what is unconceivable and unbelievable!

Let perish form us who are monks, any fear, any unsureness, any shyness, any fear of hypocrisy: the monk is meant to give faith and light to others despite himself missing those for a longer or for a shorter period of time. Even if he is in an acedia-crisis. Even if he is guilty of weakening his monastic impulse and steadfastness.

Will he be able to do that? Will he be able to work that wonder? Of course, given that he belongs to the group of Christ Who said "they are from of the world, as I too Am not from the world" (Jn. 17: 16). And again: "But I am not praying only for these ones, but also for *those* who will believe in Me, through their word" (Jn. 17: 20). And at the *Acts of the Apostles* (20: 35) Paul also says: "You must help the weak and remember the word of Lord Jesus, for He said: "Happier is to give than to take".

Verily so, by giving more than we have, we will take grace upon grace. The weak one, therefore, let him utter: "give me, Lord, when I am disappointed and empty, will and shamelessness so that I will be able to give that what I don't have. And You make this gift of mine – paradoxical, absurd, and daring – turning back upon myself by the mercy reckoned by the people's wisdom as insanity, and out of the adagio: "*Nemo dat quod non habet*" – resounding brass

and sounding cymbal. You Who ask for the impossible from us and You Who commit only that what the human mind cannot understand.

## A GOOD WORD

Christ is on the cross, naked: on His head a crown of thorns, spikes piercing His ankles and His wrists, they nail Him on the wood, His body is drenched in blood and full of bruises, and it oozes out only sweat and the deaf moan of the enslaved flesh. He has been slapped on the face, pushed, hit, mocked, He has ascended the calvary and He has been falling, and not once, under the burden of the torment tool. And now He is waiting for His agony and for His shameful death, a slow death, and atrocious death, under the double sign of the mockery and of the curse, and He is surrounded by hostile people in that the stinky place situated in the outskirt of the city, namely by a number of curious or indifferent bystanders, usual amateurs of capital executions or of public cruelties. On His right hand and on His left hand there are two other crosses, each one with its prey, two thieves, two murderers – two common law criminals so that the suffering to me even more stinging. It is at noon, the sun burns, the thirst – essence of this mode of destruction – has started to manifest and everything is but worthlessness, defeat, despair, pain, and exhaustion.

As it hasn't been enough, lo that the scribes and the scholars and the Pharisees and the Sadducees and the Herodians and the elders of the people and the whole mob of the winners are passing by; and all of them nod wisely their grey skulls; compassionately and ironically, they are defying Him, they are mocking Him, they are inviting Him to descend from the cross and to convince them so. They, allegedly, are waiting only for this: seeing in order they to believe.

Even the thief from on His left-hand is rebuking Him at his turn, he is challenging Him, he is mocking Him, he is insulting Him. But the thief from His right hand is not doing any of those; the thief from his right hand, though crucified at his turn and in pains and in dreadful waiting himself, he is finding out the will and the power for rebuking the naughty thief and is also finding out the needed altruism and generosity and noblesse for uttering some gentle and decent words to his Neighbor. That cannot help Him with anything, that cannot unchain Him and take Him down from the cross, that cannot change any aspect of that dreadful situation, that cannot alleviate His punishment, that cannot make His agony shorter, that cannot intervene in the implacable unfolding of the crucifixion's scenario. He too cannot do anything by enduring the torment *to the end of the night*.

And still, so worthless and helpless as he is, what is he hearing? "Today you will be together with me in Paradise". But why this extraordinary and totally wonderful promise? Why to be him – the guilty one, rightly condemned,

he who is powerless and without means for curing -, why to be him given the entrance to Paradise, together with the Master, while the righteous Noah, the Patriarch Abraham (the receiver of the Promise), Moses (the conveyer of the Law), prophet Isaiah (the heralder of the coming into body of the Expiator), emperor David, the prophets and all the saints from old and all the philosophers whom the Holy Ghost partially dwelled within, and the Forerunner and the Baptizer John still linger in hell? Why it is this unparalleled honor and this grace upon grace, and why is this immediateness? *Today*!

How can be explained the totally amazing character of the reward? What does that come out of? *Today, with me, in Paradise*! There is in these words an urgency, an impulse, a fullness, a boiling which cannot but stir up our bewilderment.

Some people tried to understand it by referring to the quality as *colleague in suffering of the Lord* had by the good thief. Yes, he was found worthy of the unparalleled honor of being submitted to the same condemnation as Christ was, and of being a few steps away from the Holy Cross during his last moments of life. Yes, it is natural that the Lord would have felt mercy, sympathy, and benevolence towards a colleague of suffering.

Others invoke the man's dignity, his resigned posture and his decency in relationship with Christ, unlike the another's shouts and blasphemy. Yes, here too is a dose of truth and logics.

But these explanations do not seem true to me. To me it seems essential something else, a deed (better said an attitude) seemingly meant to be easily overlooked, but one that still is decisive: the thief *couldn't do* anything, but he could tame and *sweeten up* that suffocating atmosphere, filled up with ammonia, evilness, hypocrisy, and venom. He comforted the innocent Crucified with a *good word*!

Yes, this simple, ancestral syntagm, this brief locution of the ancestral peasant-like language constitutes the most plausible explanation of the promise made by the Lord, of its fulness and immediateness and urgency. *A good word* – at is sufficed! As a healing anointment, as an absolute medicine, as a miracle.

Those few words of respect, of affection, of defense, of trust, of compassion, they suddenly changed everything and they transformed the sinister field, the filthy Golgotha, that poisoned space of injustice and of cruelty and of revenge, in a corner of humanity, in an antechamber of Paradise. Today with me in *Paradise*: for you too, now, in this desert (this *waste land*, as it will be called sometime in the future by My servant T. S. Eliot) of the wrath and of

the cunningness, you have introduced a drop of dew. For, crossing over your own misfortune, you have seen me, you have intuited Me, you have recognized Me, and you haven't hesitated to defend Me, to worship Me, to tell Me words which have poured honey within Mye heart, for you truly have made yourself partaker to My sufferings. You haven't remained locked up into yourself, isolated into your too natural egotism of hopeless man. You haven't complained for yourself, but you have been crying for me. You have found both the time and the souly gentleness for trying to comfort and alleviate the another. With a little *good word,* you have transformed this Golgotha and all these nods and all their "whoa", all this odious business and this defiled place, in a garden. As the sinner woman did too, you have anointed me with that chrism of a big price of the mercy and of the taking heed at the trouble of your neighbor. You have given Me to drink – figuratively, but not less intensely – that glass of cold water which I have told about that it won't remain unrewarded.

We too owe to follow the example of Dismas and us too to understand what price can achieve a good word in certain circumstances. If we don't have gold or silver, neither objects nor stuff, nor some material help as such, will that mean that we are destined to do nothing, to stay stiffed, cold, indifferent, absent in ghost, frozen and petrified? Or deaf, blind, and wandering with our mind? Or far, roving on realms of loneliness callous in itself?

Something, anytime and anywhere, despite the most inhospitable and adverse circumstances, it still remains us to do: let's tell a *good word* to the misfortunate who is next to us. This gratuitous and ineffective act (from practical point of view), this "surplus", this inutility doesn't represent an *empty word* but it is *a good word*. The good word of the thief from the right hand of the Lord, it fills up with a good fragrance the poisoned air of the Golgotha and, like that smooth breeze announcing Elijah on Mount Horeb about the coming of the Almighty, it dwells peace and sweetness within the human soul of the Savior.

Constantin Noica highlighted the philosophical treasures of the Romanian language. The expression *a good word* can guide us to understand the spiritual background of our Romanian language. This recourse will always remain at our hand: with a good word we can dew up even the most deserted soul of our fellow human. Let's not lose, when we have the occasion, to wipe the sweat form the face of the persecuted, as the merciful Veronica did, or of sweetening the soul of a crucified, by telling him a word of comforting and of partaking, as the good thief did.

## A PSEUDO PROBLEM

Our brother of another faith, the Neo-Protestants, they use – woe – to tell that only they can be saved and they use to rebuke us, unexpectedly (to say so), by ultimately inquiring us: do you believe that you will be saved? I wonder if it is good that we too, to answer their question by arguing with the same intransigent stubbornness that only we, the Orthodox, have the vocation of the salvation?

Declaring to them, on a proclamation tone, that they the Neo-Protestants and all the other Christians from the past, from present, and from the future, are ineluctably destined to the hells flames constitutes an answer which by its formulation itself proves its frailness and exaltation. Wiser and more pious seems to us to reject the polemical style and to take heed at the following guiding principles:

- the salvation is a mystery whose untying, depending on each case, it *exclusively* belongs to our Judge Christ. His judgment is fearsome just because of not being perfectly predictable and because of not being done by referring to written categorical prescriptions;

- substituting yourself to Him, pushing Him aside from His Judge throne, and sitting yourself on that throne, as you are a weak and sinful man, as you have an unrestrained pride, and deciding by yourself who will be save and who won't, it means committing blasphemy and it means falling into the sin of the Luciferian pride. These deeds are shouting out at the sky, and we must shun form them at all costs;

- if the Lord, only for the fact of calling your brother as insane or worthless, He reckons yourself as worthy of being judged by the synedrium and even worthy of the Gehenna of the fire (Mt. 5: 22), all the more will He do so for the unutterably graver assertion that this brother of yours won't be saved;

- we don't have the right to offend our neighbor, so that how could we think that we have the right for removing him, on our own, from the group of the aspirants to salvation?

- taking away from Christ – forcedly – His Judge privilege means contesting His so clear declaration: "It has been given to me all the power in heavens and on earth" (Mt. 28: 18). And can we limit His power up, or can we do the gesture of banishing Him from on the chair of the Judgment? Do we dare to establish limits to Him, according to our thinking that is not else but a discarded rag?

Blasphemy, what else?

Christ didn't embody Himself and He didn't come on this earth in order to repeat recurrent banalities or in order to reaffirm the poor elementary human logics or to do things expected by everybody. He came among us in order to do unexpected things, surprising and scandalous things to our Aristotelian and daily logics, to our mental stereotypies, and to our prejudices which are deeply stuck into withered routine psychics. On the adulterous woman (Jn. 8: 1-11) it would have been logical to let her be lapidated because she was caught in action and the law was clear; but He held accountable her accusers.

Also, logical it would have been that Jesus, embodied as a Jew, not to have any contact with the Samaritans and to reckon them as strangers and as heretics, consequently as removed from salvation. But He, on the opposite, He unveils His quality as Messiah to a woman from Samaria (Jn. 4: 26), and when it came to give an example of merciful man or of grateful man He referred to that Samaritan who, unlike the priest and the Levite, he had mercy on that man attacked by thieves (Jn. 10: 29-37) and to another Samaritan who was the only grateful out of ten healed lepers (Lk. 17: 12-19).

On the anointer woman it would have been right to rebuke her for the waste, as Hid disciples did (Mt. 26: 6-12), and not to praise her and to promise her the immortality by eternally being mentioned her good deed. On the thief from His right hand wasn't at all rational to take him urgently into Paradise, while the patriarchs, the righteous, and the prophets of the *Old Covenant* were still lingering into sheol, together with the Forerunner and Baptizer John. On the workers who come at the last hour (Mt. 20: 1 and the followings) wouldn't have been right to pay them equally to those who endured the difficulty of the work and the heat of the day. Was it appropriate and pious thing to qualify on Himself as eater and drinker of wine (Mt. 11: 19)? Entering the publicans' and the sinner's houses, eating and drinking at the same table with them, it could have really seem to others as a stumbling stone. Isn't His declaration: "He who loved his father of his mother more than Me, he isn't worthy of Me" (Mt. 10: 37), one that stirs up the disturbance?

If Christ had came and He had been satisfied with confiscating the human customs and reasonings and reactions, he would have embodied on Himself vainly. He just commits only surprising deeds and actions, always something else than the human logics and the Pharisaic commons sense would expect Him to commit. Christ brings into the world something new, he comes to scandalize us, to shake us up, to wake us up from somnolence and from dumb resting, not less than the *satori* procedure applied to the beginner in Zen religion. When Jesus slaps Nicodemus with: "You must be born from above"

(Jn. 3: 7) or He unveils Himself to the Samaritan woman (Jn. 4: 26) and to the blind from birth (Jn. 9: 37): "I am, the One Who is talking to you" or "You have seen Him already! And He Who is talking to you, That One is", He applies the same procedure as the Zen does;

- by quarrelling with one another and by fiery discussing who will be saved and who won't – each one claiming that only himself is worthy to be saved and his interlocutor (and all the others) are worthy only of the outer darkness – we do what the apostles did when quarrelling, on the road, who among them is the chief (Mt. 9: 33-35; Lk. 9: 46); the Lord rebuked them for their recklessness.

Rather than quarrelling with one another – on the lever of ambition, of gossip, and of rudeness – and to strife with one another because of being us driven by envy and anger, regarding our possibilities of being saved, it would be more sapient to proceed doing, by striving ourselves to the very limit of ours, to bring forth, each of us, deeds and fruits worthy of salvation.

Each of us, rather than reciprocally throwing the anathema on each other, we would prove our wisdom by praying for our own salvation and for the salvation of as many as possible people, according to the texts: "Our Savior wants that all the people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2: 4); "Do I want rather the death of the sinner and not him to turn and to be alive?" (Ezek. 18: 23), and "I don't want the death of the sinner: so, turn yourself and live" (Ezek. 18: 32).

And Cardinal J. M. Lustiger, the Archbishop of Paris says: The God of the Christians wants everybody's salvation, not only of His chosen ones.

The reciprocal exclusions, which unveil our evilness, our intolerance, and the rudeness of our soul, they only cause the disgust, the sigh, and the laughter of our Lord (this laughter is mentioned by the Psalmist too): because of how limited, naughty, and dumb the Apostles proved to be when asking the Lord: but then who can be saved? The *Gospels*' texts (Mt. 19: 25-26; Mk. 10: 26-27; Lk. 18: 26-27) show that the Lord, *looking at them*, as Matthew and Mark say (and that doesn't mean that he was usually talking to them while keeping His eyes closed, but that He was looking at them with special attention in order to make them taking heed at what he was telling them) He answered them: "What is impossible to people it is possible to God".

Could it be impossible the salvation even in cases which seem impossible to the human mind? (Remaining, of course, valid, the general rule formulated at Jn. 3: 5 and Mt. 28: 19).

- These inutile and useless discussions on the salvation prove, once more, how evil and merciless we are. If it was according to us the people,

nobody would be saved. I don't fear Christs judgment, says Marcel Jouhandeau, for He is kind and merciful, but I fear my judgment that, because of how evil I am, it will destine me to perdition. If it was according to us, says also E. Cioran, we would rather choose to stay all of us in hell than one of us to be saved. Fortunately, God is kinder than we are and there is a hope of salvation for all of us, as there were – I am using the words of the great Christian François Mauriac – also the insane hope of Dismas the thief;

- we ought not to interpret the *Scripture*'s texts in an isolated manner (as the Neo-Protestant do, by stopping themselves only upon a verse which they grant absolute prominence to) and according to a narrow literal exegesis, but in Christian ghost: let always place the ghost above the letter, because the Pharisaism isn't a doctrine characteristic to a certain moment of the history or to a certain people, but it is a grave and permanent temptation of the human spirit;

- if we judge narrowly and literally, on the level of absolutizing a certain isolated text from the content of the *Scripture*, that will mean that all of us will necessarily have to become Adventists, because nowhere in the content of the *Gospels* does Christ tell us not to celebrate the Saturday but the Sunday; *we don't have any text for Sunday*! Lo where the logics of a literal hermeneutics would lead us to;

- we better think at the following observations belonging to J.-M. Lustiger (who has been already mentioned above): when Pascal, he writes, affirms that in his decisive night he heard Christ reminding him: I have spilled for you that certain drop on My blood, Pascal must have not heard well. Christ couldn't have declared him but: I have spilled all My blood for you and I have given my whole life for you.

This is because, as Lustiger ascertains further on, any man, whoever will be, he has the right to ask for the whole. To each one, individually, the Savior has given on Himself, entirely, and each man has the right to the entire Christ, as each man has the right also to dignity, to responsibility, to freedom, to hope (be it even an insane hope);

- this ambition of the diverse Christian groups to own the monopoly upon salvation it is a symptom of intellectual infantilism, of total estrangement from the idea of the kenosis (which is central in Christology and in the Christian morals) and of transforming the spiritualism which is characteristic to the faith into political exclusivism (which has been always aiming to be the sole owner of the truth).

Beyond the literary and bureaucratic exegeses, there remain unaltered the great fundamental Christian affirmations: the respect for another, the love

for the neighbor, the disgust for the verbal violence, the rejection of the totalitarian aggressiveness, the noticing of the presence of the Holy Ghost within all people;

- let's not ever overlook that at the Fearsome Judgment (Mt. 25: 31-46) we won't be but asked about totally untheoretical, unorganized, and non-catechetic things. Only about very concrete, simple, and relational things: how did we behave to the hungry, thirsty, naked, ill, imprisoned people, and what did we do for them;

- it is not to be believed that the texts from Matthew 28: 19: "walking, teach all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"; Mark 16: 16: "He who believed and he is baptized, he will be saved; and he who doesn't believe he will be condemned", and from John 3: 5: "If somebody isn't born out of water and Ghost, he won't enter the Kingdom of God", or other similar texts, they can justify to some extent the quarrel among Christians regarding the chances of salvation.

On the opposite, to the people who quarrel it will be beneficial to meditate upon texts like:

"Crushed reed he won't break and smoking wick he won't quench" (Mt. 12: 20). "For the Sn of Man has come to search for and to save the lost one" (Mt. 18: 11); "I haven't come to call the righteous but the sinners to repentance" (Mk. 2: 17), "for I am telling you: If your righteousness isn't more abundant than that of the scribes and of the Pharisees, you won't enter the Kingdom of Heavens" (Mt. 5: 20); "For this is the will of My Father, that anyone sees the Son and believes in Him to have eternal life" (Jn. 6: 40); "For God hasn't sent His Son within the world to judge the world but in order the world to be saved through Him" (Jn. 3: 17), or "I am telling you that many form East and from West will come and sit at the table with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob in the Kingdom of Heavens" (Mt. 18: 11).

Or we should rather meditate upon some parables as that of the hirelings from the vineyard (Mt. 20: 1 and the followings) or of the wedding of the son of emperor (Mt. 22), which are true lessons of humbleness and of circumspection to them who are too easily drive to believe that they have secured their part in heavens;

- let's never be caught in the ropes of a miserable human logics in order to deduce inquisitorial conclusions (against which Dostoyevsky warned us long time ago) instilled by bitter sadistic stubbornness of many people who claim the right of speaking on behalf of the God of the love;

These discussions and this quarrel among us (we like to forget that we are not consummate) upon the creatures' vocation to salvation it seems to all

have a smell of lamentable gossip and of washing our dirty sheets in everybody's plain sight. The ostentation, the shameless trust in oneself, the habit of calumniating the neighbor, the disregarding of the Christs function as judge, all of these characterize them. Thats why, it is appropriate one to carefully remove all of those and to replace them for frequent prayers for the own salvation and for the salvation of as many as possible people, as also for deeds and fruits worthy of salvation which, neither them, and we know that so well, aren't a guarantee, because the salvation, even to the righteous and clean one, it still comes out of the mercy of our Lord, and not automatically in the virtue of our deeds. It might be that here too, as in so many other concerns, the best way is that of the humbleness and of the love for our neighbor whom how could we claim that we love if we so fiery, quickly, stubbornly destine him to the kingdom of the darkness and to the eternal torments?

And lo that like this we send on one another in hell, and satan rejoices seeing how, by our eschatological zeal, the number of his servants keeps growing!

# V.
## *LUX IN TENEBRIS LUCET*
## *- WHAT IS FAITH, WHAT ISN'T FAITH? -*

## THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

The *Gospel's* text from Saint Apostle Matthew (4: 12-17) truly is one of the most shaking texts of *The New Testament*, if not even the most shaking. Why? For it speaks to us about Christs coming *within the world*, meaning the active world, the world of the happenings and of the events, of the daily life, in the full becoming of the adult life. The little child from the manger, the child who amazed the wisemen from the temple, he now cedes the step to the young man who assumes the task and who confronts the immanence. The *Gospel*'s text presents Him to us as "a great light", as "the light that has risen", as it proceeds – perseveringly – also the narration of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John. The wonderful news is no longer a promise, but it is fulfillment, it is a real beginning, and it is a fact. Jesus is thirty years old. The law and the tradition allow him not to preach and to prophesize. The dawn has become morning, and the morning has become a hundredfold fruitful noon. And where does that take place? In the Galilee of the Gentiles, the country taking its name from the Hebrew word *galil*, meaning agglomeration, colorfulness, babel. What does that want to prove? That Christ has come for all the nations and for all the human creatures.

This is the prime of Christs preaching, the moment of the entire world's transfiguration, the crossroads of our species, the big revolution, the second birth of the humanity, the year zero, the new Beginning.

It is the moment of the wonder from Cana Galilee – the wonder of increasing, of the abundance, of the gladness –, of the reading in the synagogue of the prophetical text about Messiah, one that has become actual (Lk. 4: 17), of the people's encounter with Christ, better said of the lightning of the encounter, which, each time it takes place it is worthy of the features of the lightning: the quickness, the instantaneity, the shaking, the awe, the scourge. The encounter with Christ unmistakingly resembles to a wind-gust that desolated the whole past, as a fire fallen form the sky which is all-consuming. It was so to Natanael *Because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree you believe?*), for the blind from birth (and he said: *I believe, Lord, and he bowed down before Him*), to the Samaritan woman (*The woman told Him: Lord, I see that You are a prophet*), to Martha (*She told Him: Yes, Lord, I have believed that Youa re the Christ, the Son of God Who has come into the world*), to Simon Peter (*You are the Christ, the Son of the Loving God*), to the good thief (*remember me, Lord, when You will come into Your Kingdom*), to Paul of Tars (*And him, shaking,*

*and being scared, said: Lord, what do You want me to do?*), to Mary the Egyptian (astonished at the door of the church from Alexandria).

The ways to access to Christ are infinitely diverse. He chooses as honored vessels people who are totally different and inadequate – at a fist glance – to serve Him: a debauched as Fr. Augustine, a harsh officer as Ignatius of Loyola, a sorcerer as Saint Cyprian, as vitalist poet as Paul Claudel (overwhelmed by grace while hiding himself behind a pillar within Nôtre Dame Cathedral from Paris), a rebel, a contestant as the poet Arthur Rimbaud, a rebel as F. M. Dostoyevsky (in his Siberian prison), or as Silvio Pellico (in his Moravian dungeon), or as Evgenia Simionova Ginzburg in her arctic concentration camp where she had the occasion to offer bread to her enemy, and thus she fulfilled Christs commandment towards the investigator who beat her and who tormented her in that concentration camp, and who later ended to be himself a prisoner in that concentration camp, a profoundly knower Hellenist as the Jew Simone Veil, an eminent student of the phenomenologist philosopher Husserl (as also the Jew woman Edith Stein who was later martyr and canonized by the Roman-Catholic Church), and atheist stranger to any religious preoccupations (as André Frossard, in that church where he entered only for seeking shelter against the rain while waiting for a friend who was late; he is the author of the destructive formula usually attributed to Laplace – God is an inutile hypothesis: only God exists, all the rest is but a hypothesis), a Jew, a declared enemy of the Christianity as Alphonse Ratisbonne (upon him miraculously operated a medallion representing the Mother of the lord, forcedly accepted by him only because of wanting to be polite), a socialist erudite as Charles Péguy (attracted by Jesus after the soul crisis he experienced during a big political and judiciary scandal, and by studying the life of Joanna d'Arc, the virgin-hero-women of France), an Indian as Sadhu Sundar Singh (he dared to menace Jesus that he will commit suicide if Jesus don't show Himself to him – and the lord listened to him!), an actress of the boulevard-like Parisian theaters (Eva Lavaliere), or another actress, that Spanish woman from the XVII Century who, by after playing the character of a nun she never wanted after to get off those monastic clothes and form the stage she went directly to the monastery of the respective order, crossing through the crown of the kneeled down rows of spectators, an actor (who parodied in Rome, during the persecutions, the scene of the Christian baptism and to whom that simulacre of baptism became an officiation of the Mystery of the Holy Baptism – and he died like a martyr), a skeptical writer as our illustrious compatriot Eugene Ionesco who reached to know and to love God at his old age, after attentively reading the Holy Fathers and by keeping to follow the Light.

The ways – by the diversity of the moment, of the method, of the place, of the circumstances, of the individual – are truly countless and most of the time they are totally surprising. Like the wind, the grace blows wherever it wants, and the Son of Man appears like the thief and unexpectedly. The conversion counts among its ranks some engineers and businessmen and painters and poets and philosophers reached to be priests, by being conquered – not in their first youth – by Christ; let's not forget either about the great physician, mathematicians, and astrophysicists – among the greatest – who didn't hesitate confessing their adhesion to the faith in God (Einstein, Schrödinger, Hoyle, de Broglie, Heisenberg, Planck…).

If to Arthur Drews, Christ and His disciples aren't but a solar myth (the sun and the twelve constellations), to Ernst Rhénan Christ is but a gentle, kind, and peaceful prophet, to René Guénon (he who ended his life as Mahomedan) only the Platonist creator Logos (Buddha, Moses, Muhammad, Lao-Tse…), to Bultmann nothing else but a God who came incognito on earth (and *The New Testament*, the Christian tradition, and the Church's teaching a simple mythology), to us, the Orthodox, who is Christ? Just like to His great biographers or to the contemporary Catholic Christologists (Giovanni Papini, François Mauriac, Bishop Bougard, Henri the Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Buchberger, Daniel Ropes), or to the Protestant theologians (Karl Barth), He is, as Himself said, the Son of God and the Son of man (so is the title given by Stere Diamanti to the two volumes he consecrated to the life on earth of our Lord), the Way, the Truth, and the Life (Jn. 14: 6), the Life and the Resurrection (Jn. 11: 25), One of the trinity embodied (Jn. 3: 17), the Door of the sheep (Jn. 10: 7), the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10: 11), the Bread of the life (Jn. 6: 48 and 51), the living Water (Jn. 4: 10), our Emperor, our bigger Brother, our Friend (for He called as friends His disciples, even on Judah!) and, according to the today's pericope and to the repeated assertions of Saint Apostle John (for instance: 8: 12; 12: 46): *The Light of the World*.

Jesus, the Son of the Father, God, our Expiator and Emperor, One of the Trinity embodied, He is – to the highest degree – the one with the light. He is The One Who conquered and Who continues conquering the threefold negative force: the darkness, the death, and the hell, all three of them being images of the darkness, of the non-light, of the amorphous. Not in vain writes John, the much beloved disciple: "Into Him there was life and the live was the light of the people" (1: 4). Christ the Light is also the hope of the poor, heavily trialed life of ours, our trustful Friend, our firm support on the waves of our agitated life, just as He was to His disciples on the Gennesaret lake, on that ship menaced by waves (Lk. 8: 22 and the followings).

Being Christian, it is good for us not to lose this reality from our sight, it is a happiness, it is a sweet mystery, it is a wonderful secret. Knowing that Jesus is the Son of God and of Man, our steadfast companion, that we can always call upon Him, we can pray to Him, we can entrust ourselves to Him, we can have Him as role-model, feeling that we are accountable to Him for what we do and for what we don't do, that we can betray and mock Him through our evil deeds without getting us ashamed in the deep of our being, that we are not alone and forsaken to the hand of the determinism and of the hazard – what more acute a happiness can be there on our moments of suffering, of disappointment, of temptations, and of frustration, or of peace and joy?

The cold and the darkness can besiege us, the evil can wage was against us, but they cannot totally defeat our inward resistance, they cannot totally devastate our soul for we wear within us the fire of the Baptism. We are baptized with water, of course, but that water is Fire and it is Ghost, invisibly, as also as the bread and the wine from the Holy Impartation aren't bread and wine but they are the Body and the Blood of Christ.

Towards light and fire, we are carried also by the hypothesis of the Romanian scholar Stefan Lupasco on the final image of the cosmos. In the end, as Stefan Lupasco holds, the entire universe will be composed of only one sort of particles, namely of photons, corpuscles without mass and bearers of the light. How will the cosmos from after the end of the present world will look like? As an infinite immensity of light.

The universe will be luminous light and nothing else, when all its constituents will have become photons. What does this mean, what does this eschatological and astrophysical vision fore-image? The Kingdom of God, of course, the new world of Christ, of the all-victorious and all-comprising light. Rightly so, Stefan Lupasco thinks the cosmos in its last phase as the definitive manifestation of Christ-the-Light of the world. In the beginning there was the Word ("The Word was the true light"), and at the end it will also be the Christ-like light, the Tabor-like light, the light spread all over the creation. I see in the hypothesis of the Romanian savant a proof for the fact that the science, the philosophy, and the theology, are less strangers to one another than we usually think and affirm.

Christ, the beginning and the end, Alpha and Omega, without-dusk light of the world!

## THOUGHTS ON DEATH

"I don't fear death", lo a sentence which I think it must be received with much reserve, even when we see it uttered in good faith. The separation of the soul from the body isn't so facile or unimportant. "Bitterly is to my soul to get out of this wicked and defiled body of mine" – it is written in *The Prayer on the Death Bed*. There takes place between soul and body a communion, a weld, and there is no wonder or shame that their split generates an anguish.

The truth is, though, that this substantive, *death*, it covers two different notions and that the fear of death is manifested, because of that, under two countenance: death means the properly-said physical death, somatic, the cease of the hearts beatings and of the blood's circulation, the separation of the soul from the body, but death also designates the moment when the soul, liberated from body, if goes towards Christ and towards the Final Judgment.

Being, therefore, about two different meanings of the same word, each of them must be experienced differently:

1. The judgment, with fear and tremble, in consummate humbleness, with crushing of the heart and with humble prostration;

2. The physical death, though, in a totally different mode: with daring, with courage and dignity, standing (sort of speaking), militarily, as the valiant soldier on the fire line, even with defiance, and with an absolute calm, the main care being that of preserving the stance and the impassibility.

This absolutely necessary distinction, having as consequence adopting two adverse attitudes – one of fearful submission, another of daring and steadfastness – it takes our thought to the two famous deaths which do not resemble at all to one another: Socrate's death and Christs death. How contrary they are, how fundamentally antagonistic they are, though not few philosophers established a connection between the two death and they deemed the first death as a fore-imagining of the second death! I think they are totally wrong. Christ dies like an unlawful and as a worthless, while Socrates dies like a demi-god. Christ-God dies like a man, like the last among people. Socrates dies like a senior and like a transcendental being. The death of Christ is Kafkian and it belongs to the "dark" literature, while Socrates's death, as it is recounted in one of the Platon's dialogue, it seems to be taken out of *The Lives of the saints*, out of an exemplary-edifying stories.

Christ dies on a "scull", on a hill, on a full of garbage hillock, at the edge of the city, "outside of the camp", in a defiled place, mocked, spit at, rebuked, bearing a thorns crown, blasphemed, defied, and derided by passersby (*Huo! You Who tears down the temple and builds it up again in three days, save on*

*Yourself and descend from the Cross*), in dreadful pains. What end he experiences? Hanging on the wood, which is a cursed death. He is nailed on the cross of the infamy, exposed naked (because the girdle surrounding His waist is a pious invention of the iconographers, and out of the body nailed on those superimposed planks, when raised upwards, it always gushes out the urine – how much fun and laughter for the spectators) towards reproach, blasphemy, and shame. As comforting: vinegar; as view: seeing His poor vestments gamed at casting of lots.

*Jesus feared His death*. He waited for it by praying for three times in order Him not to be forced to drink the cup of the wrath, while His sweat that was dripping form on His body was becoming drops of blood dropping on the ground (Mt. 26: 38-44; Mk. 14: 33-36; Lk. 22: 42-44). His soul was sad to death. And how much He wanted not to be alone, to be there somebody else taking vigil together with Him! But there was none, because all three beloved apostles of His fell asleep.

As the gentler and the most scared and the poorest mortal He shows Himself in the Getsemani Garden. Being on the cross, He was accompanied only by the two thieves (both evil, as Matthew and Mark say in their *Gospels*, only one being evil as Saint Luke specifies) and the hurried hatred (not to be caught by Saturday with an unaccomplished business) of the Pharisees, of the Sadducees, and of the Herodians. And how weak He showed Himself to be! For how many times, on the Calvary Road, He fell under the burden of the Cross! And they wouldn't have called Simon of Cyrene to carry the Cross if there hadn't been the hurry because of which the scoundrels with long coats had been forced to shorter up such a much-desired spectacle! Ah! The death of the lord is only grief, helplessness, dishonor, and exhaustion.

Totally different was Socrates's death. The Athenian had a dignified and majestic life. The hemlock isn't painful, it causes a progressive palsy, starting from legs towards the heart. The warden is respectful, and he doesn't his job correctly. The philosopher is surrounded by his faithful disciples; they, unlike Christs disciples scattered all over the place. Socrates's disciples sit around him, pained, attentive, full of decency and of love, they sip his words, they sweeten and ennoble his last moments of life. And he holds a speech, as usually, and he speaks nicely, peacefully, elevating, his conscience is reconciled, he knows very well that he has been behaving like a worthy citizen who hasn't betrayed his principles, neither has he forsaken his mode of being, maybe (no, surely) also a little haughty (rightly so – hey, the life isn't simple!). And he keeps talking, he keeps philosophizing, his mouth isn't silent. There is in all these things, doubtlessly, a greatness, but there is also a dose of

theatrical-ism. On his death bed, sitting, leaning on a pillow, Socrates speaks elevated words, he advices his disciples, he teaches them, he gives them solace (and to himself too!). And how greatly and solemnly he holds – in David's painting – his left hand raised to the sky!

No, in the case of Jesus the things aren't so! On the cursed and defiled cross, with His body broken and with His head bowed, He doesn't theologize, as the other one philosophized! Christ doesn't issue noble sentences but humble words, *all-too-human* (which, of course, could have seem of a bad taste to Nietzsche): *I's thirsty; God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?* He experiences the despair and, with some kind of peasant-like and landlord-like modesty, He takes care of the fate of His Mother. Nothing haughty here, nothing idealistic! How much distance is between the noble fastuous-theatrical tragedy of Socrates's death, and the miserable death of The Another Who was exposed in plain sight for the people to see Him, lonely, tormented, forsaken, given gall to drink, who had not time for philosophy and who couldn't raise His arm because of being nailed by a spike, to the cross.

Yes, Socrates dies as a deity, while Christ dies like a miserable being.

But just this lowering and relieved by nothing death, it proves the full embodiment of the Son of God and its all seriousness. Christ doesn't die as it would result out of Docetism-Monophysitism doctrines. He dies like a man, as an unfortunate and as a miserable man, experiencing the suffering to the very end, drinking that cup bottom up, and childishly crying out: why have You forsaken me? His suffering is both physical (as awful as one can get) and spiritual, because the cross is a mockery. And it is a really true a suffering for He knew that in order that suffering to be integral and authentic, the suffering must be despaired and inexplicable. Immediately that the suffering has the slightest logics in it and it allows the slightest glimmer of hope in it, that suffering will become superficial. Of such a suffering, the Son of Man didn't want to know.

What does the crucifixion prove? It proves that the embodiment was real and in good faith; and the death wasn't only an apparent one, namely masquerade and theater, as willingly and unwillingly the Monophysites would want us to believe. Christ suffers on the cross as any tortured man, He wriggles (within the limits of His restraint), He loses His trust into His Father; He doesn't wink – to Mary, to John, to the few prudes –: "Do not cry, we'll see together on Sunday!". Dostoyevsky comments the painting of the crucifixion painted by Mathias Grünewald: as a justification of the faithlessness of the disciples in the possibility of the Resurrection of their Teacher. That dirty body was impossible to resurrect. And one can deduce the same thing out of the

crucifixion painted by Velasquez, now preserved by Prado Museum. The end sems *definitive*: how could one believe any longer in the immortality of the soul and in resurrection on that crushingly "realistic" place of the Skull? *Ecce Homo*! Lo the victory of the matter, the scattering of the dreams and of the illusions. Lo the emptiness of the words. Mathias Grünewald and Velasques *painted* the faithlessness of the apostles, and Dostoyevsky explained that faithlessness of theirs. No human rational mind could forge appearances any longer. And this is because anything that is godlike was rejected by Christ on the Cross, as He renounced to everything that is worldly on Mount Tabor. Christ has truly made Himself man not when he was born out of Virgin, but when he dies impeccably, as a man, on the cross.

But still, the God-Man so *visibly* defeated, He defeats Socrates the demi-deity. Noble, clean, valiant figure Socrates too, but not lacking that dose of theatricality immanent to the human nature and rather preoccupied with showing himself as a "virtuous" than as a "man". Authentically human is Christ, authentically human is the derisory, the defiles, and the tearing apart tragedy of His.

But we, by taking example from both of them and by discerning between the two meanings of the word *death*, we better prepare ourselves in advance, for facing:

a) the physical death as Socrates did: with dignity, with courage, with military stance, with samurai spirit, even with a little theatricality, as manly and as haughty as possible;

b) the separation of the soul from the body and the soul's departure towards judgment, we deal with it while thinking at Christ: with sweat, with our heart and blood shivering, with violent fear and tremble.

Let's pray the Lord to give us at the time of our death these two gifts: regarding the body: dignity and courage; regarding the soul: kneeling, fear, and unhypocritical repentance.

## THE PROBLEM OF THE PREDESTINATION

Referring to the *Apostle* of today (1 Tim. 1: 15: "Worthy of faith is the word that Jesus Christ came into the world to save the sinners"), I owe not to avoid making this confession:

I know the teaching of our Holy Church regarding the problem of the predestination. I know that it rejects the predestination, that is condemns the adherents of that doctrine, and that at the basis of the salvation our Church places the grace, the faith, and the good deeds. Father Cleopa, rightly so, I dare to believe, goes so far than qualifies the thesis of the predestination as a heresy.

But I still am confessing here that I have been always tempted, impressed, if not even obsessed with some of the *Scripture*'s texts, both form the *Old Testament* and from the *New Testament* which let us understanding that the fate of our souls is established in advance. Among these gloomy texts there are, in the first place, the drastic declarations of Saint Apostle Paul in his *Epistle towards Romans*, chapters 1: 28-30 and 9: 15-23. The Apostle of the Gentiles reminds us about a text from the *Book of Exodus* (33: 19) which can be used in support of the theory of predestination in favor of which it sounds categorically: "I will have mercy – God tells to Moses –whom I want to have mercy on, and I will be lenient whom I want to be lenient to". (We better notice that the phrase which Saint Paul refers to it appears – more circumspectly and more implacably worded – in *The Old Covenant*: "On him who finds mercy I will have mercy on him too, and on him who is worthy of lenience I will be lenient on him too". The connotation is, at least in the Romanian translation, totally different).

But the texts which have been always making me shiver are those from Romans 9: 18 and 9: 20-23 where God is likened to a potter who, according to his will, makes honorable and dishonorable vessels, and the last ones "prepared for perdition". But we better reread the whole paragraph in all its authoritative rigor: "So, therefore, God has mercy on whom He wants, and He petrifies who He wants. So, you will tell me: But why He still rebukes? Because who has stood against His will? But, man, who are you to answer against God? Will the creature tell to the One Who created it: Why have you made me like this? Doesn't the potter have power upon his clay, as from the same kneading to make one honorable vessel and the another dishonorable? And what is it if God, wanting to show His anger and to make known His power, he has been suffering the vessels of His anger prepared for perdition?".

The dishonorable vessels, therefore, are meant to perish and to be condemned. But this aspect of the Lord as a merciless and arbitrary potter isn't it of a nature that troubles us, frightens us and – let's say it plainly – scandalizes us?

I asked myself – not only dialectically and existentialistically, but with the unexperienced mind of an unsophisticated believer, with the mind of the coal-maker invoked by Jean-Jacques Rousseau – is it appropriate to imagine God as a potter? Among all the names and symbols which one can attribute Him – more or less adequately – forgiving about the fact that we are in an apophatic environment, is it this comparison the happiest one? Isn't our God a loving-of-people Parent? Hasn't God sent His only begotten Son within world in order to save the world – and with what price? With the price of the death on the cross. How can be God – and not without reserve and sadness – compared to a potter who kneads his clay with distant indifference and who makes out of that clay good and bad vessels, as it wasn't about the eternal fate of some souls whom a particle of the divine breath dwells within? The kind and righteous and merciful God would be only that: a potter? Isn't this metaphor pushed too far? Didn't Paul – the disciple of Gamaliel the Pharisee - allow himself to be caught in an imagination serenely pushed all the way to the point – formally and syllogistically justified – where he wasn't able any longer to escape from under its intransigence? Or, on the contrary, this metaphor in all its merciless harshness and in all its absolutism it expresses a terrible truth that exceeds our power of understanding?

In Job's book too (chapter 32 and the followings), the one who ceases the long dispute between Job and one of his visitors – called Elihu the son of Barachel of Buy, of the nation of Ram – it is a precursory of the Pauline theses form the *Epistle towards Romans*. To him too the man has no quality of questioning God's decisions. The man has no alternative but to obey ("to keep his mouth shut"), without claiming to understand, and taking as good and righteous all God's decisions. All of these aren't confounded to the thesis of the predestination, but it is not less true that in the way Elihu expresses himself (for instance, Job 33: 12-13): "God if greater than the man. Why do you speak against Him, for He doesn't answer to anybody for all the things He does?") we find a forerunner hint of the verse used in *De servo arbitrio* or in *Augustinus*, namely in the works of the two important representatives of the strict predestination: Luther and Jansaenius.

I must also not hide that the adherence to the theory of predestination of such people as Fr. Augustine (the Catholicism denies this, but to no avail), Luther, Calvin, Pascal, the Jansenists, or Karl Eearth, it has been having me

thinking a lot. Doesn't our mother Church, in its mercifulness, trying no to scare its children by sweetening the truth? Doesn't the Church speak to us non-plainly in order not to shake our trust and in order not to waste our souls? Don't we deal in this case with a very well intentioned and very compassionate *fraus pia*?

I was frightened so and haunted by doubts and fears until I read the book *Le choix de Dieu (1987)* – a title which I would want to translate it like: *I Have Chosen God* – belonging to Cardinal Jean -Marie Lustiger, the Archbishop of Paris, where I think I have found the just, the true, and the appeasing solution to the problem that was tormenting me for so long (and I am convinced that I wasn't the only one).

Lustiger says: "The God of the Christians wants the salvation of *all* the people, not only of His chosen ones". What does that mean? In the first place, it means that God has His chosen ones (His honorable vessels), destined to salvation, and whose names are written in advance *in* the book of life, this confirming the sayings of Saint Paul. But it also means, secondly, and equally surely, that all the other aren't necessarily and *ab initio* damned, meant to darkness, but allow to live in the regime of freedom in which they are able to chose themselves their fate and they can hope for salvation by their faith and deeds. The chosen ones, by the force of the things, they are a minority, a small flock, and they are called to fulfill the mysterious plans of God. But the rest of the people aren't a stuff destined to be home delivered to the devil, but it is the ensemble of the souls who during their earthly life they will achieve their resurrection of their death.

Thus, everything is becoming clear.

Yes, there are chosen ones (Rom. 8: 28-29): "For on them whom He knew in advance, He decided them in advance to be in His image... and on them whom He decided in advance, He also called them; and on them whom He corrected, He also glorified them", but the fate of the others isn't at all sealed in advance, they don't constitute – as the Cathars called them – a *massa damnata*. God wants their salvation, He wants them to turn and to be alive, and He even helps them in this regard, he doesn't impede them, He doesn't reject them, He doesn't hinder them in their good will, He doesn't throw them out if they come to Him (10: 6, 37), He urges them to ask, to knock, to search, for they will be given and opened and they will find (Lk. 11: 9). The hopeful texts are numerous: 1 Tim. 1: 15: "Worthy of faith and of all acceptance is the word that Jesus Christ came into the world in order to save the sinners"; Jn. 3: 17: "For God hasn't sent His Son into the world in order to judge the world, but in order the world to be saved by Him": Jn. 12: 47: "For I haven't come into the

world to judge the world, but in order I to save the world"; 1 Tim. 2: 4: "God, our Savior, Who wants all the people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth"; Ezek. 18: 23: "Do I want the death of the sinner, says Lord God, and not rather to turn and to be alive?"; Jer. 33: 11: "As it is true that I am alive, likewise it is true that I don't want the death of the sinner, but I want the sinner to turn away from his path and to be alive"; Lk. 9: 55: "The Son of Man hasn't come to destroy the people's souls, but to save them"; Lk. 19: 10; Mt. 18: 11: "For the Son of Man has come to search for and to save the lost one"; Mk. 2: 17: "I haven't come to call the righteous ones, but the sinners, to repentance".

This is the God of the Christians, namely the God of the love Who cannot but want the salvation of His creatures, and Who lets the Paradise's gates open and Who doesn't transform those gates, petrified and sardonic, in Kafkian barriers.

(This is because the problem, if we are allowed to make some prophane analogies, it is put like this: is the man the hero from Kafka's *Process*, of Joanna d'Arc, and of Captain Dreyfuss: namely, is the man judged according to some secret dossiers and in the virtue of some already made decisions? Is it there only a simulacrum of a public judgment?).

The solution formulated by J. M. Lustiger seems extraordinary to me and totally luminous for it solves the question with full simplicity, according to our moral institution and to the sense of justice stuck into our minds from origin, by Himself our Maker. And this solution is also according to the greatness, the noblesse, and the generosity of our Lord.

Lo that, actually, nobody was wrong: neither Saint Paul nor the descendants of his strong thinking, nor our Church that with right-reckoning refuses to subscribe to a doctrine according to which are overlooked the man's efforts towards salvation, neither the man's good will regardless how sincere and how passed into deeds and into fruits which are worthy of Lord' mercy and of salvation. God has His chosen ones: but that doesn't mean at all that all the other people are irremediably destined to hell, but it means only that they are allowed in full freedom to achieve their eternity guided by grace. God doesn't steal from them the hope for their salvation; on the opposite, He wants that all of them to be saves and this "wants" what else can mean but that He gives to each one the necessary light in order him to be able to discern the good from the bad and in order not to reject the grace. And even if the man, since his birth, he must bear the burden of some infirmities or of some predispositions which give the impression that he was created towards perdition, he still must not give himself up: but, firmly convinced about the freedom of his choice and

of his right to fight, to oppose his “fate”, and as handicapped as he is, he will wage war, as the Psalmist says, contesting the adverse premises, and making a double guide of the sayings of Churchill: “In case of defeat, defiance” and of the slogan of J. P. Sartre: “Important isn’t what they have made of you, important is what yourself have made out of what they have made of you” (The Satre’s plural referring to “others” can be understood as designating the fate, the heredity, the physiological fatalities, the mutilations occurred accidentally or inflicted by your fellow humans etc. etc.).

It may be useful to mention here “With the doors locked” belonging to Sartre: the thesis of the impressive e theater play isn’t but another variant of the proverb: “the way you make your bed it will determine how you will sleep”, now expressed like: “as your behavior has been during your life, so will you be forever and ever in the world from beyond”.

The wonderful and concise formula of J. M. Lustiger has fully appeased me: the problem of the predestination is no longer a trap to me, or a cause for anguish, of a stumbling stone. (Could our God be, I am asking again and equally bewildered, an indifferent potter, a so cruel creator than to allow His creatures struggle and to be tormented like some mice trapped in a trap, while well knowing that their end has been established in advance? Could our God be willing to prepare for satan as greater a number of slaves as possible and to home-deliver them to satan? Could us but see in our God Who has embodied Himself and Who was tormented and crucified out of love for us but a new hypostasis of the *fatum* and or the moira? Could the whole struggle of the man for cleanliness, for improvement, and for salvation – often so pathetic, so dramatic – a simple play of cheating placards, a simple scenario established in advance?

Let that not be! And is neither is. God has His chosen ones, of course, but God isn’t an enemy to all the others or a biased judge, but he is to them as merciful parent Who much desires the salvation of all of them and Who rejoices of the turning of a sinner more than of the holiness of a hundred of righteous ones, and He rejoices of the finding the profligate son with the noisiest joy than of the faithful presence of the sapient son, and He is searching for tireless zeal for the lost sheep.

A few chosen ones, but all the people called, all the people enlightened, all the people helped, all the people waited for!

As it limpidly tells us the *Gospel*’s text of today, form *The First Epistle towards Timothy*, chapter 1, verse 15, which to be us a steadfast hope.

## ON THE FEAST OF SAINT JOHN, THE BAPTIST

John the Baptist is especially known to us for the great holiness of his life. He is called an angel into body or like an angelic man, due to how harsh his life was in the wilderness and due to how intransigent his ascesis was. We know that as clothes he wore a coat made of camel hair and that he girdled himself with a belt. He nourished himself only with locusts and with wild honey.

These things are known to us, so that I reckon as more useful to evoke other traits of a saint whom the zeal of the people didn't hesitate to attribute him wings of angel, and the iconographers, at their turn, they didn't hesitate to show him in many icons and churchly paintings.

The traits which I am referring to, are:

- his absolute humbleness;

- his capacity of loving another not only as on himself but even more than himself;

- his capacity of admitting another's superiority;

- his capacity of erasing and annulling his own self by replacing it for another's self.

Saint John the Baptists life is known in the whole its simplicity and rigor. His early death constitutes a proof of what the contemporary historians and especially our illustrious compatriot Mircea Eliade like to call it as the history's absurdity.

King Herod – not Herod the Great, the killer of the innocent little children, but his son: Herod Antipa – took as his wife the woman of his brother Philip. This marriage was actually a concubinage condemned by John the Baptist with those plain words and with that harsh tone characteristic to him. The so-called wife of Herod, Herodias, a beautiful and intelligent woman, but also cruel one, ambitious, and shameless, and therefore she held enmity on John and she kept asking the king for killing John. Finally, she succeeded to have her enemy jailed: John was in the palace's dungeons. There he was when Herodias sized the occasion for getting rid of the man whose life was a pin in her eye. Being Herod's birthday celebrated, there was thrown a rich feast accordingly, being invited al the country's clerks. There, at that feast, the daughter from the first marriage, named Salome, she danced; that dance of the young beautiful girl was liked so much by the king that, drunk and sexually aroused, he told her: ask me whatever you want, up to a half of my kingdom, and I will give it to you. And he sealed his words with an oath.

Salome, because of not knowing what to ask form the king, she took a counsel with her mother. Herodias didn't hesitate: ask for the head of John the Baptist, she told to her daughter, now, here, they to bring his head on a plate. Then King Herod was shocked. He didn't want at all to kill John whom he knew about that the people reckoned him a prophet; and then that man wasn't totally antipathic to him; on his way the king respected John the Baptist and he consented to be arrested only in the attempt to get rid of his wife insistences. But the stupid king, being drunk, he was ashamed of transgressing his reckless oath. He could very well to explain to that girl: I have promised you up to a half of my kingdom, but this man is worth more than that, so that I cannot grant you your request; ask me for something else. But his mind didn't provide him with this answer, but, stupidly, he fulfilled that savage and brazing ask: John was beheaded right there in the palace's dungeons and his honored head was brought to Salome on a plate, as the wicked Herodias desired.

The absolute humbleness of the Baptist can be abundantly shown in the text of the four *Gospels* using almost the same words centered around five ideas:

- Jesus is stronger than John:
- John isn't worthy of untying Jesus's shoe laces;
- John can only baptize with water, while Jesus will baptize with Holy Ghost and fire;
- Jesus is anterior to John;
- Jesus is the One Who was to come.

Really so, the *Gospel* according to Matthew recounts: "Hew Who comes after me, He is stronger than me. I am not worthy to bring His footwear. I am baptizing you with water towards repentance. He will baptize you with Holy Ghost and with fire".

And when Jesus comes to Jordan River in order to receive the baptism, John exclaims, amazed and overwhelmed: "I need to be baptized by You and You come to me?".

In the *Gospel according to Mark* we also read: "There comes after me He Who is stronger than me. Whom I am not worthy, by bowing myself down, to untie the shoelace of His footwear.

He will baptize you with Holy Ghost and with fire".

In the *Gospel*'s text from Sait Apostle John, we find ampler clarifications: "This is the One Whom I said about: He Who comes after me, for He was before me"[37].

The Baptist is asked: "Who are you? Are you Christ, are you Elijah, are you the Prophet?".

And he – we are told by the *Gospel*'s text – "confessed and he didn't deny; he confessed: I am not the Christ, neither I am Elijah nor the Prophet".

With what a full modesty and how according to the truth, he who was asked again, he answered: "I am the voice of him who shouts out in the wilderness: straighten the Lord's ways".

And again, as in all the other *Gospels*: "I am baptizing you with water, but among you there is The One Whom you don't know, He Who comes after me, and Who was before me and Whom I am not worthy to untie the shoelace of His footwear".

John affirmed twice, pointing at Jesus: "Lo the Lamb of God, the One Who removed the sin of the world". And after the Lord's baptism in River Jordan: "I have seen the Ghost descending from heavens as a dove and remaining upon Him".

And, in the same mode, but more categorically: "This is the Son of God" (Jn. 1: 34). And then it follows (Jn. 3: 30) one of the most touching, unexpected, ravishing, and outstanding phrases of all the phrases from the *Holy Scripture*: it is the confession-declaration of the noble John: "I must get diminished, and He must increase".

Who could speak like that? Who among all the people dwelling on this earth would say about himself that he wants to get diminished, that he owes to humiliate himself, while his neighbor deserves to grow up, to increase? To the man's reasoning it is natural the opposite to that: to want growing himself up and to thrive on behalf and to the loss of the others. The others? - let them admire him, serve him, pamper him, extoll him! As much as possible, uninterruptedly, non-reticently. No one will ever declare himself as having had enough praises, compliments, servings, and bowings. He won't ever cease being convinced about his perfect superiority. The egocentrism and the idolatrizing of the self are the requests and the desires of the average human soul, and not at all the erasing and the defeat of the own self, neither the recognition of another's superiority. All the others are inferior to him and blind, and they cannot notice his exceptional traits and they cannot appreciate him as they ought to.

[37] Cf. also: Jn. 8: 58: "Verily, verily I am telling you: I am from before Abraham was made".

And still, John the Baptist does just that, that unbelievable thing, that opposite to nature thing, that scandalous thing to any normal psychic: he wants himself to get diminished, and he wants the other one to grow up, to be victorious, by affirming Himself, and by fulfilling Himself! Thats why also the phrase from John 3: 30 is so unearthly, so unparalleled, so difficult to be assimilated by our mind. In the content of the *Scripture* – rich in fascinating formulas and in sentences worthy of being imprinted into our thought -, the saying of the Baptist still shines with an untold brightness and it appears to us as a jewelry. It contradicts so obviously the tendency of any individuality to reckon on himself as the center of the surrounding circle and legitimate to grant to himself only right and to having the monopoly of the righteousness, so that he cannot help himself to be amazed, as that apple that, by defying the universal law of the gravitation, instead of falling down on earth after being detached from the apple tree, it would get elevated to the skies.

In the relationship between Jesus and the Baptist there occurs the problem of the disciples. It seems that there was a rivalry between the disciples of one and another. The *Gospel according to Matthew* (11: 2-5) and the *Gospel according to Luke* (7: 19-22) tell us that, being imprisoned, John sent his disciples to ask Jesus: are You the One Who comes, or should we wait for somebody else? This question was quite strange because we know that John confessed Jesus as being the true Son of God, the Lamb of God Who removes the world's sin, and as the One Whom the Holy Ghost descended upon. How could we solve such an obvious contradiction? The explanation which I rather consider as plausible it would be that of a previous agreement (expresses or tacit) between Jesus and John. In order to clarify his disciples and to stop the incertitudes bothering them, John sends them to Jesus with a question not representing his hesitating thought but representing the hesitations and the shadows from his disciples' thoughts. And Jesus, with that human intelligence which He didn't shy to sometimes resort to (for instance, in the case of the tribute to Caesar, or of the woman married to seven brothers, or of the sign asked for by Sadducees), He didn't proclaim Himself as being the Christ, with much ability and modesty, but He asked them to ascertain the deeds, letting the deeds to speak and inviting the disciples to draw the necessary conclusion. He showed them the things happening in reality: the blinds get to see, the def get to hear, the lame get to walk, the lepper get cleaned, and the dead resurrect. Of course, the disciples couldn't but deduce that The One Who was committing such wonders was Messiah.

But how appears John as seen by Jesus?

The text from Luke 7: 24 and the followings, it is edifier and clear. The Lord tells to the crowds, after the leaving of the disciples seemingly send to Him by Jopn: “What have you come out to see into wilderness? A reed shaken by wind? A man dressed up in soft and expensive clothes? A prophet?”. And Himself answers with a firm voice: “Yes, I am telling you: and even more than a prophet. This is the one whom it has been written about: “Lo, I am sending before You My angel who will prepare Your path, before You”. And again: “I am telling you: Among the born ones, from women, there is no greater one than John; but the tiniest in the Kingdom of God is bigger than him”.

The Lord, therefore, He confirms the angelic character of John, btu not without adding about that man recognized as “the greatest among those born out of women” the mysterious words: “Still, the tiniest one in the Kingdom of Heavens is bigger than him”. I think the meaning of these words could be this: John, the last prophet of *The Old Testament*, John the Heralder, the Forerunner, and the Baptist of Christ, he didn’t receive the Christian baptism. So being, like the patriarchs, the righteous, and the prophets from *The Old Testament*, he will dwell with his soul in hell until the Lord after His crucifixion will have descended in that place for liberating him. John didn’t receive the Christian baptism in the name of the Holy trinity, and that’s why he is reckoned as smaller than any of the inhabitants of the Kingdom of God.

We now can ask ourselves what John the Baptist signifies to us, which of his traits show him to us as admirable, namely worthy of our admiration and veneration, and which he can be by a guide and a role-model to us?

By his absolute humbleness, of course. By his total love for another, respectively for Christ, by his power for crushing the love for his own self and for replacing that love for the love for another. John the Baptist passes into the shadow, he gets erased, he seems wanting himself to become invisible. He becomes that *friend of the Groom* mentioned by Jesus in the verse no. 29 of the chapter no. 3 from *The Gospel according to Saint John*, a friend who rejoices of the joy of the Groom, and who stays and listen to the Groom with love and submission, who doesn’t desire anything but to serve Him. Lo what John the Baptist is: the wonderful example of a “self” getting out of himself and – with humbleness and with shoreless devotion – he achieves the possibility to love his neighbor more than on himself.

John the Baptist can be a guide to all of us on the narrow path of defeating our pride, our stupid pride, our ridiculous egotism that mocks us by urging us to believe that we are, each of us, the center of the world, and that urges us to believe only in ourselves, to close ourselves and to lock ourselves up into the well locked shell of our imperialistic self.

John can be a sure example to us of love for the Groom, namely for Christ, and for non-hesitantly serving Him. Yes, you could ask yourself, how can we serve and love Christ as a friend, because He is no longer in the world but he ascended to heavens? How can we stay beside Him, listen to Him, and prove Him our love?

The answer cannot be other but: do not blaspheme, brother Christians, by claiming that Christ is no longer on earth and that he has ascended to heavens so that you can no longer love and serve Him as John the Baptist did. Have you forgotten the things written in the chapter no. 25 of *The Gospel according to Matthew* where the Lord, speaking about the Fearsome Judgment, he says that for we have fed, watered, dressed up, visited, and helped some of His too little brothers who were in troubles, in sufferings, in slavery, or in needs, we have actually fed, watered, dressed up, visited, and helped Him? On Him, and nobody else.

Christ is present on earth in the Holy Eucharist under the mode of the bread and of the wine. And He is present also – equally working – under the mode of all the oppressed, tried, tempted by sufferings, by needs, and by injustices people. By loving and by serving these too little brothers of His, we actually manifest our love for Him and we serve Himself. Blasphemy would be saying that we have no one to serve as the Baptist did to Christ, for Christ is no longer present into the sensitive world! The love – supreme Christian virtue and the only perennial one – it is the unmistaken means at our hand for proving our humanity and Christendom.

Our great compatriot, the illustrious write of French language, Emile (E. M.) Cioran holds that asking the man to love is identical to asking a virus to love another virus. Naturally, how could we, for instance, ask the cancer virus to love the AIDS virus? Bu8t Emil Cioran, in his aversion for Christ and for Christianity, he doesn't take heed at the fact that the man isn't identical to a pathogen virus; this identification done by Cioran, who is the son of the priest from Rasinari, it is one both hurried and superficial. The man has, doubtlessly, common traits with the animal, but sealing the man as a virus is (at least) a reductionist one, a simple saying of a skeptic writer and of a thinker wanting to knock out his reader and to finish up his reader with stylistic procedures, of course, sparking and abrupt, but equally flimsy like the lights show of the fireworks or of the lampions of colored paper. The atheism often pushes his adherents, even the most talented among them, to enormities and childish things.

We notice in the life and in the sacrifice of Saint John the Baptist, something else: his human capacity of getting out of himself, of overcoming the

narrowness of the phenomenality, of loving on another. We dare even to adopt as our guide (or at least as a reason for distrusting brief affirmations) the shaking, the admirable, and the serene phrase from John 3: 30: “That One must grow up, and I to get diminished”.

With this phrase within our soul, within our heart and thought, and within our defeated sensitiveness, let’s leave now, not without thanking God, this holy place.

## ON THE FEAST OF WELCOMING THE LORD

"I haven't come to break the Law, but to fulfill it", says the Lord Christ (Mt. 5: 17). But in order to thoroughly understand these words we ought to take heed at the two meanings which the word to *fulfill* can have in the Romanian language. A first meaning can be that of executing, doing, fulfilling a commandment. I am told: bring me a glass of water. And I bring that glass: I fulfill the commandment. Or: bring that hoe from the church's yard. I bring it: I fulfill the commandment. But fulfilling can also have the meaning of consummating, of perfecting, of elevating to a higher level, to a superior degree.

The Lord fulfilled the Law in both meanings of the verb. Firstly, he obeyed the Law: by receiving the circumcision, according to the Law, on the eighth day after His birth. Secondly, by being brought towards consecration to the Temple, also according to the Old Law, on the fourteenth day after His birth. (When is done also the cleaning up of the mother). Thus, it was done also with Little Child Jesus – namely on second of February, today – and he was welcomed there by the righteous Simeon and by the female prophet Anna of Fanuel. When we reached to be twelve years old, Jesus, as any other Jew young man, He went to the Temple in Jerusalem, where He got lost from His parents and He amazed the scribes with His questions and answers. Finally, the Lord didn't star preaching before reaching to be thirty years old, that too proving obedience to the Law. Some people asked what was the Lord doing between twelve and thirty years, a period which the *Gospels* don't give us any information about. Was he visiting India, where He learnt the teaching of the yogis and the magic practices of the fakirs? But we don't need to resort to such hazardous hypotheses and to such fantasist suppositions, because the silence of the evangelists can be very easily explained: Jesus didn't start preaching before reaching to be thirty years old, for he obeyed the Law's imperative. And the *Gospels* don't tell us anything about that period because, according to the custom of the historians from old, they didn't record but the important deeds and the significant moments, without providing details on the preparation periods.

But the Lord didn't fulfill the Law only by obeying its provisions, btu also by consummating it, by perfecting it, by elevating it on a superior level of subtlety and completeness, by giving to the verb *to fulfill* its second meaning. What does the lord bring new, which are the main elements of His transforming vision?

The answer to this question, or better said the answers, at first glance, they can seem surprising. *Division* (or *enmity*), says the Lord, I have come to

bring, and not peace (Mt. 10: 35; Lk. 12: 51-53). And, similarly: *sword* I have come to bring, and not peace: (Mt. 10: 34). It is right that the Lord affirms (Mt. 26: 52): all of them who draw out the sword, they will perish by the sword, but in the solemn moments of the Last Supper He asked His disciples: "Whan I sent you away without a purse, without a bag, and without footwear, did you need something? And they answered: Nothing. And he told them: now, though, he who has a purse let him take it, and alike this bag; and he who hasn't a sword let him sell his coat and buy a sword" (Lk. 22: 35-36).

The Lord places the *ghost* above the letter, contrary to the Sadducees and (especially) to the Pharisees, who were slaves to the texts and narrow exegetes and minds incapable of surpassing the literal horizon of the prescriptions. "The Ghost, Jesus proclaims (Jn. 6: 63), it is the one giving life, the body is useless" (likewise, at Saint Apostle Paul: "The letter kills, while the ghost makes alive" (2 Cor. 3: 6)).

Not only division and sword the Lord started preaching on this earth, but also – on a fierce and impetuous tone – fire.

Before the Lord had started peaching, John the Baptist declared: "I am baptizing you with water towards repentance, but He Who comes after me He is stronger than me… That One will baptize you with Holy Ghost and with fire" (Mt. 3: 11). Just like *The Gospel according to Saint Luke* tell us: "I am baptizing you with water, but there comes Him Who is stronger than me… He will baptize you with Holy Ghost and with fire" (3: 16). And the Lord expresses Himself categorically (similarly to the division and to the word): "Fire I have come to throw on earth and how I wish it was now lit" (Lk. 12: 49).

The *love* is that that, in the teaching of Christ, it replaces the righteousness, which was cold and harsh. The Old Covenant was a covenant of the justice, of the strict justice, while the New Covenant is a covenant of the love which is so majestically and in unparalleled words proclaimed by Saint Apostle Paul (1 Cor. 13) in order to be the supreme virtue and the only virtue meant to eternity. Loving our neighbor is recognized as equally great as the commandment for loving God, both in the *Gospel according to Matthew* (22: 39) and in the *Gospel according to mark* (12: 31). Christ teaches us to love our neighbor as on ourselves. In *The Gospel according to Saint Apostle John* we find the same commandment expressed in more assertive terms, related to the relation between Christ and His apostles and by being underscored, in a wonderful manner, its exemplifier character: "I am giving you a new commandment: Love on one another, *As I have been loving you*, so you will love on one another". The love for the neighbor, therefore, it is established to the highest level: it must not descend under the level of the love had by the

Teacher on His disciples. And the lord continues: “By this will all people know that you are My disciples, if you will have love for one another” (Jn. 13: 34-35 and 15: 12).

The love for our neighbor is the witness that doesn’t deceive, it is the undeniable proof. They who claim of being the servant of Christ, but they hate of defame on one another, they are some shameless liars.

Also, in the second meaning of the verb *to fulfill* are comprised the advices given by Christ in *The Sermon on the Mountain* which I don’t hesitate to reckon it as worthy both of the apport of our planet to that concours imagined by the great writer and Christian Giovanni Papini, and the *Blessings* thought by him as our most precious spiritual contribution and able to ensure us the victory. With *The Sermon on the Mountain*, we have the same changes to gain the cosmic concours.

The entire *Sermon on the Mountain* is a manifestation of the fulfillment of the Old Law by consummation, by refining, and by making it more subtle. The ethical impulse from the Old Law is now being brough to the paroxysm of the culminant point.

The Lord isn’t content with the commandment of loving your friend, your kinship, or the one belonging to the same nation as yourself, the one wanting you well, the “neighbor:” in a concrete meaning. By going much farer than the Old Law, He desires and He wants us to love our enemy (Mt. 5: 43-44; Lk. 6: 27 and 6: 35). “You shall not kill” seemed totally insufficient to Him; the simple offense (words like: crazy, worthless) brought to our brother is reckoned as worthy of grave condemnation (Mt. 5: 22). How noble, how generous, and how refines is the advice mentioned by the verses no. 23-24 from the chapter no. 5 of the *Gospel according to Matthew*: “If you bring your gift to the alter and there you will remember that you brother has something against you, leave you girt there, before the altar, and go first and reconcile with your brother and then, coming, bring your gift”. In other words, as we cannot show ourselves in front of God with our hands stained with blood, identically, we cannot dare to come close to the altar with our tongue defiled by ugly words.

Equally noble and guiding towards the humbleness of the self and rich in humanity is the urge not to see the straw from the eye of our neighbor before seeing and getting out the beam from our own eye (Mt. 7: 3-5; Lk. 6: 42). The people from old were told: “Do not commit adultery”; but Christ takes a leap to a height where the simple lusting, the simple thought appears to be equal to the deed. It doesn’t suffice only not to commit the deed; Jesus asks us not even to accept the sinful thoughts. Let’s have clean not only our body, but also our thought: our thought can involve us into evil things, equally gravely as

materializing our evil thought. Also, it is not enough not to take a false oath, but you must not take oaths at all, of any sort; your word must be yes or no. It seems to me that we are advancing even further on the path of the subtlety, by mentioning these recommendations which are a proof for how much our Lord cherished the trait called as *discretion*. We are asked to be totally discrete when we pray: not to do our prayer in the sight of the people, in public places, but in our locked-up room (Mt. 6: 5-6); when we give alms "let not your hand know what your right hand does" (Mt. 6: 2-3). When you fast, he tells us (and here the *Gospel*'s text – Mt. 6: 16-18 – raises to a moral, poetical, and of elegance which both shake us and enchant us): "do not be sad as the hypocrites; because they too paint their faces with ashes in order to show the people that they are fasting... But you, when fasting, anoint your head and wash up your face". So, not only that we must strive not to unveil a virtuous deed of ours, but we must even strive to hide it!

Totally characteristic to the *New Covenant* is, of course, the mystery of the Cross that means sacrifice, suffering, and assuming the guilt. Christ sacrifices on Himself for us, and – being innocent and righteous – He takes upon Himself the sins of the world. Christ embodies on Himself in order to know in an unmediated manner the human condition; bot by recounts and by indirect information (by reports), but by personal, existential experience. And why, willingly, the Lord gives on Himself to the cross and to suffering? Right because the suffering is the definitory characteristic – one truly definitory – of the man, the trait totally characteristic to the human condition. The Christianity, said Simone Weil – who got so close to Christ but without taking the final step – doesn't give us a miraculous means for getting rid of suffering, but it gives us the means for miraculously using the suffering (to transform it, namely, in a means of knowledge – as Dostoyevsky says -, of salvation, and of love).

Christ wanted to experience the suffering in its total and awful form – accompanied also by mockery and despair, which are the spices necessary to any real suffering – just in order to give His embodiment an authentic character, of good faith, serious, and non-superficial. He reckoned the suffering as being that what is irrefutable characteristic to us, and so He understood as His duty to cross through suffering.

The Christianity isn't only Law, justice (let's not forget that paradoxical and shaking saying of Saint Isaac the Syrian: do not blaspheme by saying that God is just. A just God wouldn't have sent the Innocent One to die on the cross for the salvation of the sinners" or: "tariag" (the 613 positive and negative commandments in which the Talmud summarizes the reports between man

and godhead; the unabated fulfillment of those guarantees the doubtless salvation of their committer). The Christianity has chosen these three: ghost, fire, and love, all of them obviously “dynamic” and subtle.

Thats why, Christian brothers, it is not enough to the Christian to go on Sundays and on feats days to the church, to light up one of few candles, to bow before icons and, eventually, to prostrate for several times. All of these are good and beautiful. But I think they are not enough. The Christianity isn’t only religious service, cult, and ritual. The Christianity means Christian free *living*, day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. Our Lord didn’t come on earth in order to found a new religion, but He came in order to give us a *new way of live*, to call us to spiritualization and to deification. Christ descended from heavens and He made on Himself man as we are, in order us to be able to ascend above our animalic and bodily condition, in order us to can be deified. Christ calls us even *above the above* from the Old Covenant, into fulfilling our spiritual and cosmic vocation.

We owe to always keep next to us the Cross and Christ. The Christianity, differing from Judaism, from Islamism, from Buddhism, and from all the other Oriental religions, it is a faith into an *embodied* God. And if our God has embodied on Himself, what will us have to do? Let’s strive to spiritualize on ourselves, let’s come as closer as we are able to Him, let’s elevate on ourselves to the limit – or even beyond the limit – or of human powers; only thus we will be able to *fulfill* our purpose, to show on ourselves worthy of welcoming Christ without our hearts. This is for I am going to close this sermon by citing an all-beautiful and true saying of a pious scholar: to the question: “Where is God?” he answered: “There where He is allowed to enter”.

## ON THE SUNDAY OF THE ORTHODOXY

> "Out of the little children's mouth and of the toddlers, You receive endless praise, for Your enemies, in order You to mute the enemy and the avenger". (Ps. 8: 2).

I think I am going a good thing, on this Sunday of the Orthodoxy, by trying to summarize and to comment for you a s-called fantastic novella of our illustrious compatriot Mircea Eliade, a novella called *A Photography Old of 14 Years* and which actually represents a document of special value and importance for the Orthodox theology and for the Romanian thinking.

The hero of the story is a Romanian young man, called Dumitru, established din the United state of America. His beautiful wife, called Thecla, is a Latvian woman, gravely ill with asthma, and she is healed miraculously, from distance, by word – having in front only her photography – by a Canadian pastor in whose church (the Church of the Salvation) Dumitru entered haphazardly and by mixing some calendar's data. That pastor, doctor Martin, usually operated healings by prayers and by focusing his mind. The wonder takes place ten years after Dumitru married Thecla, and the photography he handed over to doctor Martin showed the Latvian woman at the age of 18-19 years. At the moment of committing the miracle she was thirty years old.

Four years later, Dumitru was again visiting the city where he obtained the healing of his wife. And he felt the need for going and thanking to the wonders-doer pastor. But he didn't find the pastor in the Church of the Salvation, where he was told that the real name of Martin was actually Duga, that he wasn't doctor in theology, that he was a fake healer and a crook, a deceiver lacking any thaumaturgical powers, and who served for two years in prison and now he is working in a pub owned by a brother-in-law of his.

And rightly so, Dumitru finds the former pastor at the mentioned pub. He wants to thank him warmly and to remind him what took place four years ago, but Dugay-Martin doesn't allow him to finish his speech. I am a cheat, he tells to Dumitru, I have never done any miracles, the healing of your wife is a simple suggestion. Besides, I have "paid" for my lies and deceits with two years in prison, and regarding God I am letting you find out that god doesn't exist, God died, to let me alone, do not remind me my past, and leave me. And because of Dumitru insisting to show him that photography and because of overwhelming him with his thanks and extolling God, Dugay-Martin, exasperated, utters him a profession of faith as the following:

“How can one be saved in a Church? God withdrew Himself from the world, He disappeared. Tos us, the people, He is like dead. We can say, without any trace of lawlessness, that God died, simply because of no longer being Him with us, He is no longer accessible to us. He has hidden Himself somewhere. That “somewhere” doesn’t belong to our world, it is something called by philosophers as transcendent. But to us, the people, the transcendence is a form of the death. So, if God died for us, how can the man still be saved in a Church?”.

To this plain formulation of the doctrine of the death of God and of Nietzscheanism, how did Dumitru answer? By bringing forth apologetic counterarguments, by polemizing, by shouting out loudly, by issuing another declaration of principles? Not at all. But he answered that in the most unexpected and most surprising way possible: by wishing to Dugay-Martin, in a wise-advising style, in a popular language – living and nimble, as imagined by Creanga:

“May God give you luck, doctor Martin! Luck and health! But to no avail are you scaring me that God is dying. I don’t let myself to be tricked so easily by a joke”. And more: “You cannot trick me too easily”.

Are worthy of much taking heed the syntagms: you *cannot scare me* and *I don’t let myself be tricked so easily*, and especially that charming, irresistible conditional: *God would be dying*. Th death of God couldn’t be to a sane man (regardless how big was be the number of the pedantic theologian scholars who invented the slogan of God’s death) but a joke and a farse. And to the poor doctor Martin, to the unwilling healer who has been caught into the net of some harmful fantasmagorias, what else can one wish him but health and luck?

Later on, when Dugay-Martin, involved into that discussion, turn back and affirm that he doesn’t even believe in God, neither in devil, Dumitru, again, using the same joyful, calm, willing-of-good, and unshaken by intellectualistic oddities tonality, he repeats: “To no avail are you striving, doctor Martin, to take me into temptation”.

To be noticed: the decent boy, despite the heard confession, he doesn’t stop calling Dugay-Martin as “doctor”, which in the Anglican language is equivalent to “father”. That use of that appellative can be interpreted also like this: whatever it is, you have not lost your grace.

*God forbid that!* Exclaims Dumitru while marking upon himself the sign of the cross when Dugay-Martin enunciates with an even more categorical voice: “This means that God has simply withdrawn Himself definitively, in a word *He has died…*”.

The clean boy from the Danube's banks, the son of *Mutter Natur*, the pious and the grateful young Romanian, who as a riposte against so many blasphemies he limits himself to humbly mark upon himself the sigh of the Cross, he is shaken by neither of the recent great feats of the Occidental culture: neither the semantics, nor the sociology, neither the Zen (enthusiastically adopted from Asians), nor the Absolute Spirit, neither the universal language. He knows and he doesn't shy to utter up and loudly his creed: God is, the grace is working, we are surrounded by mysteries (and it is not appropriate to spy on them with too much zeal), God can, by having mercy on His chosen ones, to work wonders, and the man can be saved. The healing of Thecla, from distance and by word, it seems to Dumitru as totally possible, and all the doubts and the worries of Dugay-Martin, he assertively removes them. Regarding the famous Nietzschean theory of the death of God – a foundation for the doctrine characteristic to some Anglo-Saxon and German theologians from the sixth and seventh decades of the twentieth century – he reckons it as rather nonsensical, a droll of the mind, a pure blasphemy, and a divagation that cannot be met more efficaciously but by uttering calming wishes, exorcising words (God forbid that!) and by marking upon himself the sign of the Holy Cross.

The simple, unabated, incorruptible faith, it stands against and it faces, in the novella belonging to Mircea Eliade, of course, not the true culture, but the deviations, the absolutizations, and the perversions of its. Each time when the culture, through its diverse interpretations, if strive to drop the faithlessness into the man's soul, the making frail of the grounds of the right-reckoning and the mental chaos, it deserves to be confronted by the man with a whole mind. Dumitru isn't a theoretician, neither he is a partner to an abstract and erudite discussion. He is amazed, he is indignant, but he is gentle in the same time regarding the psycho-pathological wanderings of the good doctor Dugay-Martin, a chosen vessel who doesn't accept to realize what he actually is; Dumitru believes that, by the will and with the help from God, Dugay-Martin can work wonders, so that Dumitru smiles leniently, with an impeccable politeness, and with some kind of mercy, to the one who has fallen into the snares of the devil, a devil adorned with the liar vestments of an intellectualism escaped from under the control of the healthy rationality, of the common sense, and of the right-reckoning.

Dumitru, briefly speaking, he is an Orthodox. And, especially, he is a Romanian Orthodox believing in God, in grace, in wonders, in the priestly grace, in the power of the prayer, and in the possibility of being the man saved within the Church. This simple faith of his, it is firm and it comprises

themselves the bases of the theological system specific to the creature whom Mircea Eliade liked to call: the man from the Danube banks, an unsophisticated individual, but not a stupid one, and who was not talked out easily, and who was not tricked with scary phrases or converted to the solution of the despair by inviting but empty words.

The ceaseless bonhomie of Dumitru, his non-deviation from a patient compassion for the poor pastor bewitched by abstruse theologies and philosophies sprang out of wandering minds, it constitutes the fascinating attraction power of this novella. Dugay-Martin struggles, dominated by remorse and enslaved to catastrophic conceptions, while Dumitru is serene, controlling on himself and strongly supported by his faith. Dugay-Martin cannot believe not only that he healed Thecla of asthma – from distance and with the participation to prayer of all the people present in that church – but he even made her younger: the proof was that photography, now of fourteen years old, which Dumitru shows him and to the clients from that pub – while a songstress is singing a stupid song – a photography which the *time hasn't passed in*, because Dugay-Martin made Thecla identical to her look in that photography, as she was when being eighteen-nineteen years old.

Dumitru doesn't let himself to be deceived, tempted, disappointed. God exists, the grace works, the wonders are real, the man's salvation is totally possible. We are not destined to the absurd, the world has a meaning. The creed of Dumitru is strictly Orthodox, he voices out - in that American pub so different from the bucolic world where he was born and raised – the fundamental elements of the Easter Orthodox thinking. Finally, Dugay-Martin, ravished, conquered by such a good faith, warm, steadfastness, and purity, he admits: "As Dumitru is, with his naïve, idolater, and vain faith, he is closer to God than all of us. And he too will be the first to see God, when the true God will show His face again".

Dumitru's victory (relative, to be fair, because the pastor still reckons him as idolater and naïve) actually is the Orthodoxy's victory, as it was confessed in Chicago, in the year 1959, and not less limpidly than Petru Movila and the Synod from Iasi did in the year 1642.

Lo why, when I have the occasion in the summer of the year 1970, at Varatec Monastery, to ask Constantin Noice for the approval to read to him some of the main paragraphs from Eliade's novella, I also dared to formulate the opinion that the true title of the charming work is: *The Orthodox Confession, Chicago, the Year 1959*. Of course, a confession that is not dogmatic, systematic, or complete, but it is authentically ontological, perfectly mirroring the psychic fund, the mystical sensitiveness, the ideational field, and

the programmatic quants of a people tied in their overwhelming majority to Christianity and Orthodoxy, which have become to them true reflexed of their mind and feeling.

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## THE SUNDAY OF THOMAS

We have got accustomed to speak about the faithless Thomas and about the Thomas's Sunday, namely of the faithless Thomas. This is for there are sounding within our mind and in our ears the much and often read versed from *The Gospel according to John*, chapter 20: 24-29. There we are told about Thomas who told to the other discipled that he won't believe that the Lord has resurrected until he sees in His hands the sign of the spikes and until he will touch His side with his hand. The same text lets us know that after eight days, being the disciples gathered together, Jesus came to them through the locked-up doors, and He sat amid them and spoke to Thomas: bring here your finger and see My hands and bring your hand and touch My rib and don't be unbeliever, but believer. Consequently, Thomas, overwhelmed, answers Him:" my Lord and my God!

But if we don't hesitate studying the other *Gospels* too, we will ascertain that not only Thomas was unbeliever; unbelievers were all the apostles, so that on the Thomas's Sunday (meaning of the unbeliever) should be named all the apostles haunted by faithlessness.

Rightly so, the *Gospel according to Saint Mark* (16: 10-14) show us Mary Magdalene going to announce the apostles that she saw the Lord alive, but the apostles didn't believe her. The two discipled going towards Emaus was in disbelieve too. So, Jesus showed Himself to the apostles and rebuked them for their faithlessness and for the callousness of their heart.

The *Gospel according to Saint Luke* (24: 10-43) is even more explicit: the annunciation of the eleven apostles by the prudes had as result the fact that their recount was reckoned as a *delusion* (verse no. 11) or, in other translations: *empty words* or *delirium*. We are told in continuation about the happening with the two disciples who were traveling towards Emaus. The text shows us that they were sad and that were no longer hoping, after *three days passed* from crucifixion, in the accomplishment of their Master's sayings. They too, when mentioning the information conveyed by the women, they used a very skeptical language (*some women of ours frightened us… by saying that they saw a showing of angels, who told them that He is alive*): "some women", "frightened us", "by saying that", this language is as reticent, as prudent, as non-enthusiastic as one can get. Starting with the verse no. 36 forwards, the *Gospel according to Saint Luke* is more categorical: when Jesus shows Himself standing amid them, the apostles – getting scared and fearing – thought they were seeing a ghost. The Lord (speaking as Thomas did in the text from John) rebukes them and invites them to look at His hand and at His feet, and to

touch Him and to ascertain that Hs is not a Ghost. More than that, in order to fully convince them and in order to erase any trace of doubt form their mind, He asked them for food and He ate before them.

There isn't aby doubt that none of the apostles believed: none, not only Thomas, because it wasn't believable at all! It must have seemed to them to definitive and irreversible the crucifixion, the death and the defeat of Jesus. The promised of their Teacher: nice words, scattered illusions, deceits of the thought!

In order to more drastically understand the despair of the disciples, we better refer to two paintings which, among thousands of other paintings of the most famous painters of the world, they present the crucifixion without edulcorating it and without sparing the watcher sensitiveness. One painting belongs to the great German mystical painter from the end of the XV Century and from the beginning of the XVI Century, Mathias Grünewald - *Mathias the Painter* as called by the composer Paul Hindemith – a painting that is now in the museum from the city (today in France) Colmar. The other painting belongs to the equally famous Spanish painter Velasquez that is exposed in Prado Museum in Madrid. I saw both of them and I am going to convey at least a little bit from their horror. In that painting of Grünwald the ground if black; the cross is on the fore-plan, so *close* to the watcher than seems to literally stay in his face (any "artistic distance" being annulled); the fingers and the toes of the crucified have become as claws spread towards the sky, some thorns loaded with spasms; the thorns crown seems to be metallic; the body is covered in blood all over and also covered with some sort of pustules, of holes, of inexplainable wounds (some sort of an *epidermic irruption* of the suffering); the body's color is between black and coppery and it seems – twisted, contortioned, bent – metallic too; the head is collapsed.

The thieves cannot be seen, neither the other malevolent witnesses of the awful show. Only Magdalene, on the left hand (of the watcher), on her knees, and in fiery prayer. A little further to the left, there is the Mother of the lord dressed up in white, passed out in the arms of Saint John (in red cape). On the right hand, there is an old man, wearing a beard, and keeping in his hand a book and with his right hand's pointer finger he guides the watcher's eyes towards a cross: he is the narrator, the evangelist, the referent.

In the *Crucifixion* painted by Velasquez the sky isn't black, but it is very dark and gloomy. There are the thieves too. Besides, the Golgotha is empty, the public amateur of "intense scenes" withdrew (they are in a hurry, there comes the Saturday, they are afraid not to get defiled – they don't think at the defilement they committed by crucifying an innocent). Only a character, in fore-

plan, in a vast yellow cape, a gloomy and of bad omen yellow, difficult to forget, seemingly bearing in the plie its creases all the sins of this world.

Both the painting of Grünewald (where are awful especially the claws and the seals of the pain which invaded the entire body) and of Velasquez explain in the most striking manner why the resurrection was unbelievable and why, consequently, the apostles couldn't believe it! Regarding Grünewald the great Christian Dostoyevsky makes this ascertainment and, commenting it in details, he concludes: it was unbelievable and they didn't believe either!

The bodily collapse in the whole its nothingness and awfulness, it undermined the enthusiasm of the thoughts and the warmth of the souls.

As also other important moments of *The New Testament*, that one from the first Sunday after Easter, it poses the problem of the faith, which we must remind about that having faith mustn't be confounded to seeing, to ascertaining. This mistake was committed by the Pharisees, by the Sadducees, by the elders, and by the scribes who, on Golgotha, they were exclaiming: "Christ, the king of Israel, let Him descend from the Cross, *for us to see* and to believe" (Mk. 15: 32). If you see Him, the only thing left to you is that of recording, of ascertaining, and of obeying. But the faith is everything but not this. On the contrary, the faith is "the entrustment about the hoped things, the proving of the unseen things" (Hebr. 11: 1). To believe means especially *believing the unbelievable*. The faith stays beyond human mind's limits and it implies a *total trust* of the believer in the things he believes. (We can reckon the trust as being the intimate, visceral, irrefragable hypostasis of the faith). The Apostles proved to lack this total, illogical, regardless to evidence (or even against evidence) trust. They were overwhelmed by the reality; they were disappointed in circumstances.

And still, the Lord pleases Thomas and the other disciples of His: he proves them His resurrection on a material way, as Thomas wanted; he obeys them, He pleases them, he shows His hands and His feet, he invites them to touch them and to touch His rib with their hands. If so, that means that Thomas and the other apostles were excused, for He realized that they couldn't but have been defeated by the too obvious and definitive and irremediable character of the crucifixion. The lenience and the complacence of Christ prove that the apostles, humanly speaking, they couldn't have reacted otherwise but by despair, consequently to the humiliating killing of their Teacher.

The Resurrection, a mystery that exceeds and crushes the human understanding it supposes a faith able to transcend everything. Able to cross beyond the human mind's limits, able to notice or to suspect that it doesn't belong to this world, that it established a direct connection with God, able to

notice that by having faith in what is unbelievable we enter – as our great Mircea Eliade enounced – the relation with the ultimate mysteries of the creation and with the uncreated works of God.

On the Resurrection Day, on the first Easter day, the Christian is partaker to what is beyond the borders of the human understanding. For a certain while, the Christian succeeds to no longer be, at his turn, "from this world". But on the Thomas's Sunday we are come back to the level of the human mind, Christ Himself resorted to material, raw, simplistic proofs, matching the will of Thomas, namely of the human creature: He showed His hands and His feet and His rib, and He asked them for something to eat in order to demonstrate that he wasn't a ghost.

Yes, we totally come back to the level of the human mind. The full-of-grace, the enlightened, and the supra-worldly week from after the Resurrection, it has come to an end. Those days seemingly enlightened by the uncreated light have passed. Christ is again humbling on Himself through a new kenosis. After the kenosis of the embodiment in a poor country defeated and occupied, in the modest family of a carpenter from a unimportant and disregarded provincial city, of the death in torments and on a cursed wood, now, on Thomas's Sunday, He humbles Himself by consenting to bring material proofs, as any man suspected of not telling the truth and forced, in order to proof his good faith, to bring irrefutable evidence. And this He does it too, on this last day of His kenosis.

The end days of our Savior appear to us, therefore, as a sinusoidal line, starting in the upper point of the Pam Sunday when He is acclaimed with hosanna and called as emperor and Son of David; the following point is that of the defeat on the Friday of the awful crucifixion; that is succeeded by another superior point, maxim – that of the Resurrection!; and this is followed by another moment of kenosis from on Thomas's Sunday (Jesus must prove His godhead right to His disciples), and after that comes the all-integrating moment of the Ascent that put an end to the sinusoidal and pendulant movement.

The atheists and the critics of the Christianity use Thomas's and others' episode for putting in front of the Christians what they call as "the crisis of faith". Can't you see, they argue, that even His disciples doubted of Him? All the more we can suspect all of you that you are not of good faith but you only pretend of having faith. And they mention the paradoxical phrase of the father of the demonized child: "I believe, Lord, help my faithlessness" (Mk. 9: 24), an expression, at its turn – as they say – of an ambiguous faith.

Oen can answer them: the evangelists - honest, realistic, unhypocritical - didn't falsify the truth, they didn't intend to camouflage it: they recorded the

moment of human (and explainable) doubt and they mentioned it without hesitation or haste. But they also recorded the declaration of the same Thomas: *My Lord and my God!* that puts a clear and to the crisis. The crisis is overcome by now, and the temporary faithlessness has been scattered. The short and absolute exclamation of the former "unbeliever" annihilates everything that preceded it. (Just like the tears and the shouting out of the father of the demonized child solves the critical point in the faith-faithlessness binomial).

So, all of us – who believe in Him and who confess Christ as our Lord and God (*Dominus et Deus* the Roman called their emperors since Aurelian, by using the syntagm of the apostle) – let's pray Him to turn Himself mercifully towards us on this day, called as Thomas's Sunday, when we are getting out from under the spell of the Paschal days and from under the shield of the Enlightened Week and we are reentering within the borders of the human and earthly life, and let's prove ourselves as being Christians by keeping live within us, for the whole year, the ghost of the faith into the Resurrection of our Lord, in order that, ceaselessly, step by step, to be us accompanied and guided and strengthened by this ghost. If, in order not to be us reckoned as lacking our modesty and discretion, we cannot utter daily, as Saint Seraphim of Sarov did: "Christ has resurrected!", let's repeat equally perseveringly this exclamation within ourselves, as a variant of the Prayer of the Heart.

**WHAT IS IT FAITH, WHAT IS IT FAITHLESSNESS?**

Matthew 9: 27-35

From the mentioned *Gospel*'s text we can detach, I think, four main ideas:

1. Testing the faith;

2. Itself the problem of the faith; what is it the faith and what is it the faithlessness?;

3. The commandment of not-announcing the miracles, the only godlike commandment which we are entrusted about (but not forced to) to disregard it, to transgress it;

4. The problem of the absolute evilness, of the stubborn, petrified, locked-up in itself evilness.

Reiterating:

1. We are ascertaining that the Lord teste the faith of His servants, by previously asking them: *Do you believe that I can do this?*

From where it turns out that the committing of the miracle implies the faith too of the one whom the miracle is committed upon. The help from the Lord, the committing of miracles, they appear to be related to the faith; the operation takes place in a field of the resonance effect.

Then the Lord tells them: *According to your faith, be it to you*. The help, therefore, it is proportional with the faith. The bigger the faith is, the fuller the help will be. To the Cananean woman, following to the manifestation of a steadfast faith and unabated by rejection, by silence, or even by a grave offense, the Lord tells her: be it to you as you wish (Mt. 15: 28), an exceptional lenience motivated by an exceptional character strength.

2. The text puts itself the problem of the faith and urges us to ask ourselves: what the faith is?

We know that having faith means something else that seeing, else than ascertaining, else than recordings; we know that the words said by hierarchs and by scribes at the Crucifixion of the Lord (Mt. 27: 42; Mk. 15: 32) – "so that we could see and believe" – don't mean only blasphemy, mockery, and mercilessness, but they men also a mistake of semantic order, because of confusing the two opposite verbs: *to see* and *to believe*. The faith excludes the sight; the faith is the entrustment about the unsee realities, as saint Apostle Paul affirmed it in almost all his epistles.

But in order to more deeply understand the notion, it is appropriate us to take heed at *The Gospel according to Saint Mark* and especially to the verses no. 21-24. There, the words *I believe, Lord! Help my faithlessness* seem to indicate

a grave contradiction and the existence of an unsolvable paradox. How can one - as any sane mind would judge it, in the same time - believe and confess his faithlessness? Isn't this to the existentialist philosophers and to atheists by and large, the justification of their objection addressed to the believers: you are of ill faith, you lie to or you delude on yourselves.

The things will seem to be thus if we lose from our sight the way which words uttered in, by the child's father: the text shows us that the father (1) asks the Lord for help, (2) with tears) and (3) by shouting out loud.

The faith is not annulled and it is not hypocritical, because of the apparent paradox, because the father assumes the precarity and the humbleness of the human condition (always tempted to faithlessness), but he also overcomes that by asking for the Lord's help with tears and by shouting out loud. The paradox is solved just by this surpassing of the critical moment. We are tempted to faithlessness (some sort of shadow of the faith), but we get out of this contradiction and, paradoxically, we do that by humbly assuming our instable and uncertain condition and by affirming our faith not theoretically, not with indifferent coldness, but with tears and with shouting out, namely out of the depths of our most uncontaminated by conventionalism intimacy.

Lo how can we remove the objection of the philosophers who created the argument of the "ill faith": there is no trace of ill-faith words of the father, word which are actually of himself the human being; there is only the admission of a situation which one can get out of only by the act of will, of hope, and of trust. Proof are the tears and the shouting out – that is called faith.

We shout out, we shed tears, we ask for help, we humiliate ourselves, *we are not ashamed* and thus we surpass the critical point reckoned by existentialists as being without escape, but which is in reality as passable as the temperature of 1000 degrees Celsius for the boiling water or the sound speed for the supersonic planes.

3. The Lord gives to the blind ones the commandment: "Take care, nobody should know it". And the blind ones transgress that commandment (Mt. 9: 31).

Christ often gave this commandment of not heralding the miracles He worked. To a lepper whom He healed, He tells him: "Don't say it to anybody" (Mt. 8: 4), to a multitude of healed ones "He commanded them not to unveil him" (Mt. 12: 16), to another lepper: "And commanding him harshly, He immediately banished him away and told him: "Do not say anything to anybody" (Mk. 9: 43-44). After healing the daughter of Iair: "But he commanded, strongly, that nobody should find out about that" (Mt. 5: 43). Or,

on the same occasion, in the text of the *Gospel according to Luke* (8: 50): "And He commanded them not to tell anybody what happened".

But if the Lord Himself transgresses the rule by telling to His disciples: "Go and tell John what you hear and what you see: the blind ones regain their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleaned, the deaf hear, the dead resurrect, and the poor are given good news" (Mt. 11: 4-5). Then, the Lord refers Himself, repeatedly, to His great miracles when talking to the Pharisees and to the Jews and rebuking them for their stubborn faithlessness.

Anyway, the blind ones, the lepers, the mutes, the demonized, all the healed ones didn't listen to the Lord's wish, but they *rather* recounted the happened things!

And they were right!

This is the sole commandment of Christ which we have permission not to keep it. We can even declare that we are kept not to obey it, our main duty being that of recounting, with a loud voice, the good bestowed to us by the Lord. Let's not be silent, let's not hide the good or the wonder which we have been found worthy of. Let's herald Christ as the Samaritan woman did (immediately she arrived to the city she started to recount to everybody the things which had been told to her), let's become, as she did, heralders of the lord.

So does also the author of these rows, who has been brought out, by Christ's mercy, from the darkness of the sin and of the faithlessness. He has never understood to place the light under the bushel, or to be silent, because of a wrongly understood discretion, or out of baseless shyness. On the opposite, to the best of his capacity, as clearly and as strongly as he has been able to, he has been confessing the grace descended upon him, not that he is able to speak – to the past – together with the Psalmist (Ps. 72: 22[38]): "For I was mindless and I didn't know; I was like a beast in front of You, Lord".

4. Hos do the Pharisee react in the presence of the activity and of the miracles worked by Jesus? What explanation do they give to His numerous and scary miracles?

A very simple one: with the lord of the demons, with Beelzebub[39] He removes the demons (Mt. 9: 34: "With the lord of the demons he casts out the demons"; Mt. 12: 24: "This one doesn't cast out the demons but with

[38] In KJB we have: Ps. 73: 22. (E. l. t.'s n.)

[39] Contradiction of the Hebrew words *baal zâvuv*, literally: the Lord (or emperor) of the flies, one of the mocking names given to the devil by the Jews. It is being manifested even by now the intentions to compromise the Teacher with the help of the subtle weapon of the mockery, the triumph of which will be the use of the crucifixion as mode of defeating the One Who was reckoned as opposant to the Law.

Beelzebub, the chieftain of the demons"; Mk. 3: 22: "And the scribes who were coming to Jerusalem said that He had Beelzebub, and that with the lord of the demons he is banishing away the demons"; Lk. 11: 15: "And some of them said: "With Beelzebub, the chieftain of the demons, He casts out the demons").

Lo what they understood (people who, otherwise, they weren't stupid, they weren't illiterate, they didn't lack some beautiful features, and who were somewhat attracted by the personality of Jesus Whom they were following step by step not only for spying on Him and for tempting Him, but also because He was charming them determining them to invite Him in their houses to dinner), lo where their mind took them at. They too belonged to the same category of people callous in their hearts and in their thoughts, who, regardless how much good you do to them and regardless how kind you are to them, they won't be able to realize the good and the kindness. They are suspicious to the kindness, they attribute to it the most egotistic or wicked causes, and they quickly defile the good, by bringing everything down to the level of their soul that is sunk in evilness, in vulgarity, in venom, and in poison. Any discussion is inutile. Everything is in vain! They cannot conceive the good, they cannot intuit anything else but that what they know about themselves. They cannot exit the (magic) circle, the pot, the cauldron, the pit, the dungeon locking them within their worthlessness. They are so evil that they cannot conceive even the most obvious good. But why, the lord asks them, why would satan be upset on himself? Why would satan work against his own forces? To this so limpid and decisive logics of those questions they answered only by silence.

The arguments and the evidence were vain to them.

The Christians do not think like that. They can escape the bewitched circle of the suspicion, they can believe the good they see, they can believe the existence of the good as such, they can escape from the locking up of their own evilness. The Pharisees – still alive – they locked themselves up in the hell of the total mistrust, of the always altered suspicion, of the without-concessions evilness, of the perfect opaqueness. And from there they gnash with their teeth. They spray gall, they sarcastically and helplessly grin.

It belongs to the Christians not to judge their fellow humans, unlike the Pharisees perceived and valued Christ. The Christians must not see in the others only the work of the devil and only source of evilness's energy. They must contradict the undifferentiated Satre's formula: "The others, lo the hell!". The devil masters upon us by mistrust and by suspicion; this power (but not almightiness) of his, it can be denied by the Christians, they can liberate on themselves from it. They can liberate on themselves from mistrust as also form the other great intervention of the devil: the faithlessness.

To the Christian, the *others*, all his fellow humans, they are not, necessarily and unmistakingly, the elements of an earthly hell. The Christian do not see everywhere around them only evilness and devils. Ah! – that doesn't mean they must be stupid and morons, always wearing on their lips a false smile, nodding with benevolence and stupidly, blessing persecutions and injustices, and shouting-at-sky deeds, and preaching that all the things are good and beautiful. We know very well that not all the things are good and beautiful, that there are in the world: the illness, the pain, the suffering, the hunger, the torture, the tyranny, the lie, the victorious stupidity, the sadism, and so many other evil things. We clearly know about all of these, and it would be inappropriate to us, when facing them, to cover our eyes and to utter sweet but vain words. But, to us the Christians, master of the world is, after all, Christ and not Beelzebub. That's why our minds and our hearts aren't callous, and our eyes and the cogitating eyes of our heart aren't blind.

We do not boil in the stew of our own evilness as in a covered pot, we are not slaved of the stubbornness and of the enemy mistrust, in our non-callous hearts – which do not imply also minds incapable of noticing the reality in its scary complexity and rich in demonic manifestation – the good can enter when clean and unpretending. We do not willingly lock up on ourselves while on this earth, by projecting around us the deposits of the ancestral sin and the residues of our acceptation to commit sins. We preserve, between the show of the good and the show of the evil, a balanced state having its grounds in the right-reckoning. We do not see Christ as the action comrade of the devil, his odd and strategically destructive tool, or the intermediary of a trick perpetrated by the chief of the evilness. We see in Christ the Son of God Who came into the world in order to save the world and to work only the good. We see in Him our benevolent Expiator. We see so, so we believe, and so we confess. So may God help us!

## The Generosity of the Lord

From the famous *Gospel's* pericope of the *Profligate Son* (Lk. 15: 11-32) I am intending to mention here the syntagms referring to the father's behavior (in the person of whose many exegetes recognize the Lord).

We find out from the text that the profligate *still being far*, his father sees him and he rushes towards his son. The text says: *runs*. The father feels *mercy* on his repented son and with a gesture of love *he embraces him* and *he kisses him*. After he kidnaps in this way the coldness of a solemn gesture, and by this he confers to it the sweetness and the warmth of a perfect affection, the father starts taking some household and concreted order measures: he commands to be *quickly* brought *the first coat* of his son, to be put a *ring* in his son's finger and *footwear* in the feet of the hungry and destitute one, who was, of course, barefoot and clothed in rags. These things regarding the person of the newly arrived; there follow the dispositions regarding the celebration of the event: *the slaughter of the fattened calf*. And the specification of the as glad ad abundant as jovial character to be given to the feast in preparation: *let's eat, let's gladden ourselves*. So it happened: when the sapient son comes home, he hears *songs and dances*. The feast in in full swing, without reticence and without subtleties: the people, in good heart, they laugh, they shout out, they jump up. Nothing rigid, nothing stiff, nothing pretentious in this candid explosion of the satisfaction.

What is turning out form here (and from other paragraphs too – kindred in spirit with this one, from the *Gospels*)?

- the generosity of the Lord, I believe, His noblesse, His majesty, showing Him as a knight, as a *gentleman*, as a gentilhomme (as the French say), and a great aristocrat (in etymological meaning of this word), as noble (in souly and spiritual meaning). How else but as of the superior man, generous and knight, as of the boyar (in His heart and in His mind) can these striking and certain traits of Jesus Christ, could be considered?

- the love for the enemy (insistingly recommended – Matthew 5: 14) going all the way to the prayer on the cross, done for not being take in account the awful sin committed by them who crucify Him (Lk. 23: 34), which means in the same time the absence of the grudge, of the vengeance, and of the evilness (which are inferior and wicked sentiments);

- the forgiveness: Peter is advised to forgive not for seven times but for seventy times seven (Mt. 18: 22);

- the mercy: proof for this are the countless healings done out of mercy (the hunched woman, the man with withered hand, the sick with dropsy, the

man with palsy…) or the resurrection of the son of the widow from Nain, of the daughter of Iair, the feeding of the thousands of people in the desert (*I have mercy on them*) with the parental thought that if they will be sent home hungry, they could faint on the way as ones who came from far (Mt. 15: 32; Mk. 8: 2-3).

- the discretion: when we give alms let out left hand not to know what our right hand does (Mt. 6: 3); when we fast let's anoint our head and let's wash up our face (Mt. 6: 17);

- the trust, as indubitable sign of inward cleanness and of noblesse, only the worthless man being suspicious. Why? Because he judges the others according to his own uncleanness and according to his own evil impulses, and he attributed them the lawless and the wicked things he would commit if he was them.

The mistrust isn't but the mirror reflecting the wicked part of the suspicious one, some sort of portrait of Dorian Gray. The honest man whose judgment power isn't corrupted by apprehensions having their headquarters into a mirky subconscious, above anything he is not suspicious and, until the irrefutable evidence of the contrary, he trusts his fellow human, *he gives him credit*. The Lord, in that scene of the storm on the sea (Mt. 8: 24-27; Mk. 4: 37-40, Jn. 8: 23-25), He rebukes His disciples especially because of this: because they didn't trust Him or the power of His presence next to them;

- the generosity: - He, multiplying the bread and the fish, feeding once four thousand people (Mt. 15: 38; Mk. 8: 9), on another occasion five thousand people besides women and children (Mt. 14: 21; Mk. 6: 44; Lk. 9: 14; Jn. 6: 10), urging His disciples to a fishing consequently to which they weren't able to pull out their nets because of the multitude of fish (Lk. 5: 6; Jn. 21: 6).

Christ bestows like this, on every time: grace upon grace, shaken and pressed, rewarding tenfold, hundredfold, thousandfold, according to the rule of the composite interest. For, rightly so, how does He answer, how does He bestow, by throwing a meager tip?

By no means! But by doing the honor to him who has opened Him the door, of dining with him: "Lo, I am standing at the door, knocking; if somebody hears My voice and he opens the door to me, I will enter and I will dine with him and him with Me" (Apoc. 3: 20). Even more than that (Jn. 14: 23): If somebody loves Me, he will keep My word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to Him and make Our dwelling place at him". In other words, God will come to the worthy one not only to feats but also to dwell there. And what does He promise to His apostles at the Last Supper? "To eat and to drink at My table, in My Kingdom, and to sit on thrones" (Lk. 22: 30).

The reward, therefore, isn't other but the invitation to the imperial dinner. Jesus could have referred to many other gifts, favors, and good things, but all of those – unimportant – wouldn't have been matching His generous, noble, and infinite nature: him who loves Him and who obeys His commandments, He will place him at the imperial table, He will grant him the status of a commensal of the Holy Trinity, and not less than that! And in this way is preserved the happy tradition inaugurated to the Mamrie Oaktree.

The transformation of the water into wine at the wedding from Cana Galilee is, at its turn, a sign of greatness and generosity. And the parable of the workers hires at the vineyard I think it must be interpreted in the same way. It has been attributed divers meanings; some exegetes like to see in the workers coming only in the eleventh hour and paid equally to them who came in the first hour, the martyrs whose blood sacrifice equals the long ascesis of the hermits. I for one think that the same payment regardless the hours of toiling can be explained through the generosity of the landlord, through His disgust for accounting and calculations. Let's remind the saying belonging to Blaga: in Paradise they do not calculate, calculating in paradise if a sin. Lack of cheapness and of merchant spirit, of care for money and decimals, lo what is proven – above anything else – by the parable recounted at the twentieth chapter of *The Gospel according to Saint Apostle Matthew*. The landlord's words (namely of the Lord) confirm my hypothesis: "Or your eye is evil for I am kind?" (Mt. 20: 15).

The same absence of smallness and worry for money is proven also by the Lord's reaction when getting anointed with chrism by the sinner woman: on the apostles, that *waste* upsets and scandalizes them. In the *Gospel according to Saint John* it is mentioned as upset and scandalized only Judah (Jn. 12: 5). But Saint Apostle Matthew tells us that all His discipled got angry (Mt. 26: 8), and Saint Mak writes that "they were sad and *some of them* spoke against" (Mt. 14: 4). Anyway, it turns out that the apostles, woe to them, they reacted, by and large, very humanly and worldly, like some prudent and fearful small landlords who get irritated by any unselfconscious and facile use of money. Three hundred dinars, as they probably told to themselves – in the same time sad and scared – for some chrism, for a fragrance out of which, in a few moments, there will be nothing left!

They, doubtlessly, love their Lord and Teacher, but they cannot remain indifferent while witnessing such an act reckoned by them as being obvious recklessness, so they feel offended in the deep of their being of sapient men. But Jesus rebukes them with quite enough harshness and with melancholy, as a great "boyar" as He is, and he exposes to them that what after two millennia

would constitute the foundation of the *theory of the sacrifice* proposed by the French philosopher Goerges Bataille: the man can be recognized according to his capacity of sacrifice, according to how much he is able to "waste" from his wealth and good in a non-utilitarian manner, only for the elevating and euphoric pleasure of bestowing to somebody else or to celebrate pompously some event, or to grant to himself the free joy of getting out, from time to time, from the monotony and from the sordid of the daily life.

By interpreting the anointment with chrism as a good fragrance sacrifice, as a manifestation of love and as a symbol of His close embalming, by rebuking His disciples for unveiling an obtuse mind, a cheap conception upon life and an avarice attachment to money, Jesus against shows Himself to us as a real *gentleman* and in the same time as s role-model for all the Christian who ought to be as less as possible enslaved to the perishing goods of this life and as convinced as possible that Christ is worthy of any of our sacrifice and that nothing is too good or to expensive for Him;

- Jesus is constantly *polite*. "My friend" or "friends", He usually call His interlocutors. Even when it was about Judah, He used the same appellative: "friend".

He is also gentle, namely *calm*, and only the Pharisees succeeded in making Him angry because of them possessing two abundantly vulgar traits: the lie and the hypocrisy.

We see the Lord keeping a *dignified stance* in all circumstances, regardless how grave or dangerous they were. Fo instance, when he is brough in front of the synedrium or of Pilate. That silence, which the clerk was wondering of, what is that if not a manifestation of His "stance"? – and of His *courage*!

This is for Christ Who willingly climbs the Cross, He is this in the first place: a valiant!

Christ loves the courage, He preaches it, he wants His disciples to be daring, He urged them: Do not be fearful! Do not fear! Do not be scared! Dare!

The Lord despises the fear; He mentions it among the sins; he mentions the fearful among the first souls destined to the pit of fire (Apoc. 21: 8). The courage, the main among the virtues specific to the superior and noble man – lo the teaching and the example of Christ!

Also, as proof of courage, of dignity, and of altruism I reckon the words of the Lord from the Getsemani Garden towards them who came to catch Him: "I told you that I am. So, if you are searching for Mew, let go these ones" (Jn. 18: 8), this proving the care of the betrayed and cornered One for not involving His

disciples and His friends in His tragedy, for not endangering their liberty of their lives;

- Christ, as any authentic aristocrat - in the etymological meaning of the word -, He reckons Himself as being a servant. “The Son of Man – He declares (Mt. 20: 28; Mk. 10: 45) – hasn’t come for being served, but for Him to serve”. He washed up the feet of His disciples in order they too to do that to others (Jn. 13: 14) and in order Him to forever be a role-model to their behavior.

On the prophane plan there is, parallelly, the formula of King Frederic II of Prusia: “I am not but the first servant of the State”. He answered the hosannas and the bowings with despise; he didn’t have what to do with those. He didn’t like to be extolled. He made about serving the State a high idea, reckoning it as an absolute duty which required to be practiced on a daily basis. He was following, therefore, in the domain of the statal activity, the teaching of Christ Who didn’t hesitate to wash up the feet of His disciples in order to establish the principle that the chief of a community must be, in the first place, a servant of that community.

As generous noble man, as discrete and modest and courageous and elegant and dignified in his behaviors and spontaneous and generous in his relationships with others: look hos our Lord proves to be. It is good for us to know, by deducing out of the parable of the Profligate Son, that if we take a step towards Him, he will take a hundred steps towards us. Anytime ready to forgive, to embrace us, to forgive our transgressions, our stupidity, our endangerments, to rejoice of the turning back of the sinner with a joy not less simple, sincere, and naïve than that of the shepherd finding his lost sheep or of the woman finding her drachma lost into the house. Those give us courage and hope! For we are ascertaining that our Lord isn’t a merciless accountant, as harsh and small spirit, a stubborn keeping of the evil in memory. Just like the father form the parable of the Profligate Son, at any time in the day or at night, he is willing to forgive us, for forgive our sins, and consequently to rejoice Himself and to be glad. This detail is paramount: He doesn’t only forgive, but he does this kind deed without hesitating and that it provided Him too with joy. The father, namely the Lord, He rejoices not only for the lost one has been found and for the dead one has resurrected and not only for the beneficiary of His act of clemency. He rejoices also for the joy he provides, he gladdens Himself together with the repented man, or even more than that one, and he reckons as appropriate to rejoice without avarice and without false shyness, for the blessed event. After any conversion Jesus sits at the table with the person who experienced metanoia (with Zacheu, with Levi-Matthew), he rejoices Himself with the healed hunched woman, he dines with Peter’s mother in law

whom he escaped from fever, He doesn't hesitate from stabbing the fattened calf and go rejoice, dancing and singing, when the one whom his parental heart was longing for, he is coming home. We are not required anything else but to turn back to Him: fearless, doubtless, hopeful, and trusting Him; the dinner is ready, the doors are open, the calf is plenty and fat, everything is well-ordered. We are required to only this! – in one word – like the sponge erasing the black table of the eraser erasing the letters form a paper – Christ abolished our entire past regardless how dark or dirty our past would be.

Out of the biggest sinner, He can make a superhuman, namely, actually a man. This is for the essays-writer Svetlana Paleologu tells us rightly: "the supra-human isn't but the just measure, in essence, of the true human".

Christ does just this: He unveils the supra-self from within us, in other words the camouflaged man, covered by the consequences of the ancestral falling and by all his sins and ugliness and lawlessness. We don't need, as Nietzsche thought, to rebel against Christianity, to leave Christ, in order to access the state of supra-man. Totally on the opposite, only Christ is The One providing us with that state. He ennobles us, He elevates us to our old aristocratic state, as the hero of Cervantes – *El Nuestro Señor Don Quijote, El Christo Español* – conceived the peasants and the merchants from the pub as the true nobles gathered in the big hall of their castle.

This is the "magic" of Christ – the Restorer: the placing again of the man into his Paradisiacal state from yore, as the noblest among beings. The *Parable of the Profligate Son* isn't but the putting in a shape of a story – as Paul Ricoeur and other contemporary critics would say – of the miracle called the man's reestablishment in the blessed Adamic condition, in his *first coat*. Happier this time, adds Dostoyevsky, given the profligate will remember his mistake and the precipice which he has got out, so that he will experience a beatitude superior to that of the initial Paradise.

## HONORING THE SAINT ARCHDEACON STEPHEN

One can ask why the Church celebrates Saint Archdeacon Stephen, the first martyr of the Christendom, right on the third Christmas day, immediately after the birth of the Lord and after the celebration of the All-Pure Mother of the Lord?

Why is this great and exceptional honoring?

In order to answer this question, it is good to stop for a little while upon a distinction of grammatical order; such a distinction will facilitate the exact interpretation (and the discovery of the deep signification) of the main text referring to the martyr we are celebrating today.

Our language knows two neighboring verbs which still aren't totally identical. *To sit* means in Romanian being placed upon something (a chair, a bench…), while *to stand* means staying upright, vertically, on feet. The people, in the current language, they mix up the things and they use indiscriminately (and therefore wrongly) the two terms. They say, in a pleonastic manner, sit down and stand of your feet. They also say, when wanting to invite somebody to sit: please, stay – which is again an error. But in order to understand as due the text from *Acts*, chapter no. 7, verses no. 55-56, we ought to take heed at the correct use of the verbs *to sit* and *to stand*. What to we read at Acts 7: 55-56?: "He saw the glory of God and Jesus *standing* on the right hand of God. And he said: Lo, I am seeing the heavens open and the Son of Man *standing* on the right hand of God".

How is characterized that one who spoke like that while they were throwing stones at him? As a man full of faith and of Holy Ghost, full of grace and of power, miracles-doer and signs-doer among people, a wiseman; and his face "like an angle face".

Why, we ask again, the text from *The New Testament* uses the verb *to stand*, namely to be on His feet, and not the verb *to sit*? In icons, only, Christ is always represented as *sitting*, on the right hand of the Father, on His heavenly throne. And the liturgical and exegetic texts refer to Jesus as sitting into glory, and never standing.

There is no doubt that, in order to receive the sacrifice of His first martyrs, the Lord stood. And for what reason? Out of respect for the Archdeacon Stehpen and in order to honor him in a special manner. To this first act of sacrifice, of confession, and of courage, the Lord understood to assist from heavens in an honoring attitude. The Lord respects and honor Stephen for the courage he is proving, for he confesses Him, and for he doesn't

reject his Savior and he doesn't get ashamed of Him, for he faced his enemies and for he strived to demonstrate to them the truth of the right-faith.

Lo what the meaning is, simple, of the presence of the verb *to stand* in the text from Acts, chapter no. 7, the verses no. 55-56. It is not a haphazard presence or an inadvertence, or a confusion of words. The verb *to stand* was preferred to the other verb just in order top underscore the will of Christ for unveiling His consideration and His love for a courageous man who doesn't get ashamed of Him, and who is ready for yielding his life for the faith which, without shyness, he has exposed it. For a righteous and valiant man.

What do we deduce from that? Wha conclusion do we draw from the recount from the *Acts*? One and doubtless: Christ love the courage, He Who said for so many times: Do not fear, do not be scared, do not be fearful, why are you fearful, dare, I have conquered the world. While in the *Apocalypse* unveiled by Saint Evangelist John, the fearful are the first mentioned (chapter no. 21, verse no. 8) among those destined to the pit of fire.

Saint Stephen is just this: an example of Christian courage; he believes, he confesses his faith, he doesn't reject or be ashamed of Christ and he accept to die for Him.

The fundamental evangelical texts which the Martyr Stephen proves through death his devotion to, are four in number and they sound as limpidly as one can get, by clearly showing what Christ expects form those who dare to say that they are His disciples. Let read those texts in their entirety, though all four of them express the same idea:

Mathhew 1: 32-33: "Anyone who will confess for Me before people, I will confess for him in front of My Father Who is in heavens. And he who will reject Me, I too will reject him in front of My Father Who is in heavens".

Mark 8: 38: "Because he who will be ashamed with Me and with My words in this debauched and sinful generation, the Son of Man too will be ashamed with him, when He will come into the glory of His Father with His angels".

Luke 9: 26: "Because the one who will be ashamed with Me and with My words, with him the Son of man will be ashamed too, when He will come into the glory of His and of the Father and of the holy angels".

Luke 12: 8-9: "Anyone who confesses for Me before people, the Son of Man too will confess for him before the angels and before God. And he who rejects Me before people, he will be rejected before the angels and God".

These texts were fully obeyed by Saint Stephen, who wasn't ashamed, who didn't reject, who confronted his accusers and who remained steadfast in his faith all the way to his death.

Another fundamental text for the problem of the courage and of the rejection of Jesus we can find it in the *Epistle towards Romanis*, chapter no. 10, the verse no. 10: "This is for with the heart one believes towards righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses towards salvation".

This text seems to had been a guide to the martyr whom we celebrate today[40] and I think that it must be, to us too, a permanent rule.

Saint Apostle Paul teaches us that the inward faith if not enough, regardless hos sincere and warm and deep. It is not enough. There is unmistakingly needed, if we want to be saved, the confession with the mouth on each time when we are in the situation of proving who we are and what we believe in. On this duty of the Christians, we have had the occasion to talk before. But I think is won't be useless to repeat: if we don't confess Christ with our mouth, namely publicly and with a loud and unhesitating voice, regardless which risk would this profession of faith of ours imply, we vainly think we love Christ and delude us that we are Christians. Or maybe we love Him partially, unworthily, temporarily, frailly, and dishonestly. Saint Stephen shows us how we ought to behave in order us to prove, if needed, our Christendom.

The text from Romans 10: 10, I am inviting you, brother Christians, to take it very seriously and in its most categorical meaning. Do not get drunk with plain water by uttering within yourself: I love the Lord secretly, I don't dare confessing Him with a loud voice, I needed I will reject Him in order not to get into trouble or to face difficulties. "Formally" doesn't exist, it is an illusion, it is a trick handed over by the devil, it is a devil's lie. If – in any way – we deny Christ in front of the people, of our fellow humans, if we give them the impression that we are not strong in our faith, that we play hide-and-seek with our faith, that we change our faith as it would be a coat, we will have already rejected Christ without needing to bring sacrifices to the idola. Taking, for instance, part to atheistic gatherings, upholding an atheistic doctrine (or even accepting that doctrine), avoiding to make those gestures and to utter those words which prove what we are, it means being ashamed with Christ and, consequently, to destine ourselves to be rejected by Him on the Judgment Day.

Let's not forget, let's never forget that Christ loves the courage, that He stood in order to honor the valiant Martyr Stephen; that He asks us not to be fearful, to ne daring, fearless, and unimpeded by troubles, suffering, or even by death.

If not, it will be bitter to us: we will be enslaved and mocked in this world, we will lose our freedom on earth because of our unveiled cowardice,

[40] Though this text is ulterior to Stephen's martyrdom.

and we will lose our salvation, giving to ourselves the hardest and most pitiful blow that can be, by condemning ourselves to reproached and to hardships in this world and to damnation in the world from beyond. By thinking that we can deceive God – this is a big nonsense - we actually deprive ourselves, at once, of all the good on earth and in heavens. Let it not be so! Let's memorize the lesson of the Confessing-Archdeacon: for them who are courageous and not-ashamed with Him, Christ stand up, with love and with respect, while to the fearful or to the lukewarm, or to the hypocrites, or to multi-faces, or who believe in cheap cunningness of the type "I did it only formally", He rejects them, he feels ashamed with them, he knows that they willingly destine themselves to the fire pit. Being a Christian means, into history, assuming some risks, and it means you to be able to face dangers from positions of souly strength. The courage, brother Christians, it is proven to be also the wisest way, and it is not only a virtue, but it is also a Christian duty.

We are embodied and we live in a world. That's why our relationship with Christ is not only of purely intimate order. It supposes also the connection between soul and his Savior but it also takes the shape of an indirect connection: individual – community – God. We correct ourselves and we clean ourselves, and we elevate ourselves by believing with our heart; but we prove our being and faith by confessing it before people; we cannot make abstraction of the "others". The Lord tells it us clearly, and the illustrious example of Saint Stephen confirms the godlike words recounted by evangelists.

## TWO KINDS OF PIOUSNESS WHICH WE OUGHT NOT LEAVE: HONORING THE CROSS AND HONORING THE MOTHER OF THE LORD

I don't reckon as useful – and it is not my habit to practice them – the contradictory discussions with those whom the world usually gives the name "sectarians", namely with our brothers of another faith. Everyone is free to believe as they wish, and to go on the way which their heart carries them on, and which their conscience urges them to, following, of course, to bear the responsibility for the choice they have made. The teaching of Christ is founded right on these two entities: on the full freedom of the individual, and on the full responsibility on the day of the Great Judgment.

But there are two kinds of piousness which, with deep sorrow, I ascertain that our brothers of another faith stay far from, so that they deprive themselves of two great and wonderful consolations, and they commit, in the same time, I am convinced about that, two immense mistakes.

People affirm bout Cross, in a way or another, that it was a simple means for torture and killing, and what would be the reason for extolling it and for venerating it? (passing too easily over the fore-imaginings from *The Ol Testament*: the staff of Moses, Jacob leaning on his staff and blessing his sons, the Israeli army victorious only as long as Moses stood with his hands stretched[41]). To what avail should we worship and abject tool for tormenting and for execution destined to criminals, used by Romans and by Jews? And we are even let to known that the sign of the cross and the cross itself are real profanations of the Christian cult. Consequently, the cross is removed from the prayer houses and from the spiritual life or our brothers of another faith.

The are wrong because of renouncing to a good and powerful support. The cross, to Christ, it isn't a simple and degrading instrument for torture and for killing. It is the *holy* Cross sprayed and sanctified with the all-cherishes and all-pure blood of our Savior. It is an altar, it is the sacred place of the Innocent's suffering, of the Redemption of the mankind and of the breaking of the chart that was pressing upon us since Adam. On the cross dies the One Who, by obeying the commandment of His Father and for our salvation, He empties on Himself of His godhead and He received the death, and even the death on the cross. On the cross was officiated a religious service and a sacrifice and an act of placing the mankind back into their situation of original incorruptibility.

[41] Uphold by two people, one on his left hand and one on his right hand, unlike Christ Who was alone on the cross, enduring His pains all the ways to His death, under the helpless gazes of the thieves.

Christ, our brother and friend and companion, but also the One Who found His end on the cursed wood, under the ironical and victorious gazes of His relentless enemies who were thirsty for the show of the writhing of the poor body destine to death. The defames One, the defeated One, the One prey to an inanimate object fulfilling – coldly and harshly – its dreadful purpose: and this One is Christ. Should we overlook Him?

The kenosis of the Cross is the most limpid and the strongest proof of the totality and of the seriousness of the embodiment of God. It was chosen a small, poor, and subjugates people, it was preferred the modest family of a carpenter (not of a noble, of a rich, of a scholar, or a priest). Even more than that, in order to provide the embodiment with its irreversible, totalitarian, authentic, honest, selfless character, it was chose the death on the cross, a terrible torment, a long one, a shameful torture which was reckoned as a supreme infamy: in order to transform the embodiment of the divinity *into total acceptation of the human condition*. It seems to me that it has been foreseen in the boo of André Malraux, *The Human Condition* (where the prisoners are thrown alive into the cauldrons of the locomotives) and all the string of atrocious torments contrived on the duration of eons by the inventive mind of the man, a mind which is no less fertile or less sadistic than the mind of the devils. The Lord wanted to know in full reality the human condition in its less camouflaged, maximal, exasperating form. The true truth, *The End of the Night*. And how can we to forget and to go past to this act of unimaginable love and of unparalleled partaking of our plain human incertitude! How much injustice, insensitiveness, ingratitude, petrifaction, callousness, and despise we would show if we done that! How much would that make us brothers to those who passed by the place of the Skull, shaking their beards and sarcastically grinning?

To deny, to forget, and to make ourselves nescient! Wouldn't have us become disciples of the elders and of the scribes who had been laughing at a fellow human (as they reckoned) of theirs, by mixing the hypocrite mercy with an impetuous joy, and uttering: let him descend from the cross in order us to see and to believe? Not mentioning the cross, shining to remember the things happened on Golgotha is, seemingly, the same with minimalizing the deed of Jesus, or to demote His deed among other pitiful historical details and wanting, at all costs, to forget an unpleasant incident. There were also other important prophets, teachers, philosophers, doctrines issuers, and who preached beautiful, elevating, wonderful things. But who is that one who yielded his body and who willingly accepted a long and awful death? No one accepted to die "like a dog", like Kafka's hero. And just this characteristic of Christ to be

suppressed into the deeps of the conscience and dominated by the worry for burying the accidents (or, be it, of the heroes) which are upsetting our souly serenity? Eliminating the essence, the capital deed, the unparalleled deed for our psychic, which is above all self-pitying?

The cross, geometrically and symbolically speaking, it is the sign of the intersection of the two plans, it is the union between spiritual and material, it is the metaphor of our double nature: spiritual and earthly. The cross summarizes us, it recapitulates us, it represents us graphically and cardinally, it exposes us in our double – paradoxical, perpendicular, fundamental – solemn and derisory situation of a creature which belongs both to the world and the heavens.

Why, we could ask, it had been chosen the cross as means for torture and for killing the Son od God? Probably because it supposes a long agony (of a nature satisfying the hatred, the envy, and the wickedness of the accusers – who were still forced to quicken up the spectacle lest the Saturday would catch them and lest the ruler to change his mind, a reason why Simon of Cyrene was used too: ease the suffering of the deceiver only us to see Him dead!); then because it represented a shameful mode of execution generally reserved to the slaves and to the thieves. The Old Law reckoned the hanging on the wood as being a sort of cursed death, and the Romans reckoned it as an infamous execution (Crucify Him!). Bu I imagine that the true and deep explanation, *psychoanalytical*, it is given to us by its *verticality*: the man, the spiritualized creature, the biped, the sole creature always standing up while walking, he is punished just by that feature of his: it is punished by being exposed to the rebuke, to the mockery, and to the humiliation; he, the being having the sense of the shame, he is totally naked (the girdle around our Savior's waists is a pictural fiction), he is defamed and mocked just by what define him and differentiate him from the other animals, that what ennobles him. He is nailed (he, a superior, noble, active, free being, he who is capable of looking at the skies and at the Creator face to face) on a lousy and stinky wood and let to die by itself his verticality: the organs enter the ptosis, the thirst becomes an all-dominating torment, he is exposed naked to the indifferent or mocking gazes of the his fellow humans (nobody, as the *Gospels* tell us, didn't proceed - as the good citizens from Coventry when Queen Godiva was walked naked through their city – to turn away their eyes). The crucified man is destroyed by that what brought him his adornment and uniqueness. Nothing is added to the cross. The torment is *pure*, it comes from what the man has more characteristic, more worthy of amazement and of strength. What a triumph for the enemy, with his hands not covered in blood, being exonerated of using any

artifact! On the cross the man is not properly-said tormented: he is only brought out of movement and of freedom. These characteristics of the being – his psychophysical coordinates are turned against him. Are you vertical? You will die vertical, because of itself your verticality. You are only immobilized, *tel quel*. In the full loneliness and intensification of your primordial features. The mockery doesn't consist so much of nakedness and immobility, as of parodying the two axes – vertical and horizontal – which describe the state of uniting the coordinates of the universe, by making of it a caricature of a central figure of the pain and of the derision. (The whipping, the crown of thorns, the spikes are, otherwise, of Roman origin. The Pharisees and the scribes can wash up their hands; we are not doing anything to you; we are tying you on the wood and we are going to let you die).

Getting the cross's wood out of the places for Christian cult, avoiding to mark upon us the sign of the cross, the silence regarding the supreme sacrifice, are all of them proofs of flagrant ingratitude, of historical hypocrisy, and of complex (psychopathological) will for forgetting the finality of the earthly life of Christ Who ceaselessly, in the most diverse circumstances, he referred to His death which He was to endure.

A Christianity without cross it would be identical to that proposed in one of the most terrible stories of the *Witnesses of the Sufferings*, by Giovanni Papini: the Great Rabi offers to the Pope the conversion of all Jews, asking in exchange for being erased from the *Gospels* the episode of the Crucifixion. Through His sacrifice on the cross He proved to be Jesus Christ Son of God and Son of Man. For that He has been given the power to judge the world, for He knew the world as thoroughly as possible, and directly as possible: through suffering, through the suffering reserved to the most unworthy among people. Socrates, the man, he died while surrounded by faithful disciples, he was treated respectfully, he sipped out of the cup with painless poison, he was philosophizing, serene and dignified, as a deity. Christ-God chose His part with the thieves and with the unworthy. He dies forsaken by His own people, expose naked, challenged, apparently forever defeated and compromised, exemplifying - vertically and exasperated – the human condition.

A human condition which is not only His. It is of all of us too. By covering it up, we lie to ourselves, we betray, we deprive on ourselves of that thing which our salvation has been done through. The greatness of Christ, unlike the much honorable end of Socrates, it consists of accepting to die as the least one of His creatures, uncomforted, knowing the despair (as what would be the human suffering without the feeling of the despair but a pseudo-suffering?), a human rag nailed by spikes in order to be submitted to the

contempt, to the rebuke, and to the fun of His adversaries (or of the numerous amateurs of strong sensations). Socrates dies like a deity, imperturbable and distinguished, Christ dies like the most vulgar malefactor. This is the proof of His divinity, in His integrality, and of the integrity of His embodiment. Without cross and crucifixion, Christ would be a great and noble preacher; only through them He confesses to be Son of God, Son of Man, and Expiator.

Rejecting the cross – even without blaspheming intentions – it means not understanding the earthly mission of Christ, His will of *identifying* Himself to the human fate, to know it in its most direct form. *Ecce homo*, this words of Pilate identify the Sin of God to the man and they unveil to the man how great was the love of the Builder for His creature. On the cross have been united the godhead and the mankind - indissolubly – and it has been sealed the deification of the creature. By placing the cross in an honorable place in the church and in our homes, by wearing is on our bodied and on our clothes, we actually affirm our co-godhead, we celebrate the human condition which is but the will for theandrism.

Regarding the Mother of the Lord, rejecting Her is pure aberration and oddity, one that is incomparably impossible to understand!

Our intercessor, the gentleness itself, considered by Catholics with good, modest, and moderate righteousness as: *o Clemens, o pia dulcis virgo Maria!* and Who with the power of Her innocence, of Her obedience, of Her courage and gentleness, She confronts the laws of the causality and the simple absolute and mechanical justice of this universe shielded ins its strict justice! On Her, Who maybe is the same with the affirmation-desire of Dostoyevsky: that two plus two sometimes to equal five. On *The Woman with the Scarf* from the play of Diego Fabri: The Process of Jesus*)* who doesn't' hesitate to cover with her scarf of a simple woman, even the head of the wicked who, unforced and untortured, he sold his friends and his battle comrades. On That One Who ceaselessly prays for justice (as Saint Issac the Syrian believes), Her who defends the desperate cases, Who prays ceaselessly for all the sinners, the guilty ones, the mistaken ones, and the marginals! For disregarded, for rebuked, to the totally alone people, for them who have nobody to love them, to have mercy on them, to smile at them (regardless how fugitively), and to pray for them!

How could we banish from us (or treating Her with indifference) That One Who is near to the persecuted, as in the song of Georges Brassens: near to the innocent woman violently beaten by her drunkard husband, near to the child banished away from the house of his parents, near the crippled child bullied by a gang of bums, near to the unhealable infirm who doesn't have anyone to take

care of him, near to the tortured who cannot take it anymore and he is about to cede…

Not in theological subtleties are interested the common people who believe into the Mother of the Lord and who hope for Her supra-natural help. Not whether She was immaculate on the moment of conceiving (the dogma of the immaculate conception and of the undefiled conception, 1854), or only since the moment when She answered the heralder angel *be it to Me* and the Non-Comprised One dwelled within Her. Not if She was elevated with Her body to heavens by Her own power (dogma *Ascensio corporae Beatas Virginis Mariae as caelum*, 1950) or whether She was elevated there by the power of Her Son. These theological subtleties must be left in the care of the competent scholars.

To most people the Mother of the Lord is the Mother always ready to forgive, top pray for us, to dare before Her Son with Her mother courage and to pray Him for the poor mortals. This is – as the text says – for much can do the Mother for reconciling the Master. The Mother of the lord is the spring of the tears, She is the tireless defender (advocate), unembarrassed (without shy), and our persevering advocate against the strict justice. She represents in heavens the feminine sweetness and the unlimited maternal love.

I feel so much pity on them who disregard Her. To them it is applied the saying of the late Cardinal Ottaviani about atheists: the atheists aren't sinners, they are wicked. I am not ashamed of imagining the Mother of the Lord striving for us, asking, begging, intervening, insisting; as I am not ashamed of childishly imagining Her – but not heretically – as running to the gate of the Paradise with a little silver vessel in Her hand and with Her scarf on Her arm, to welcome the martyrs of Her Son, to invite them with a unimaginably good jam, and to sweep their forehead's sweat and blood with her holy scarf. They must be very sure of their Pharisaic virtue-justice and they must laugh at mercy and at lenience, in order they to show themselves with their haughty forehead at the gates of the paradise, they who reckoned the Lord's Mother as "a simple faithful woman". Good for them. We, the ones from below, we the sinners, we who are unsure about our fate waiting for us, we who fear the Final Judgment (and the temptations and the dangers which surround us on this full of traps earth), how could we not feel exceedingly happy to be counted among those who believe in the mercy of the forever Virgin Mary, Who is the joy of all the troubled ones?

That's why, we reckon as good our prayer from before going to bed, that one uniting two the kinds of piousness: "Oh, all-honored and of life-maker cross of the lord! Help me with the Holy Lady Virgin Birth-Giver of God and with all the saints, forever, Amen".

**The Hunched Woman**
**(The 27th Sunday after Pentecost)**

As to other suffering ones too, the Lord, form His own initiative and unsolicited, Hew helps the hunched woman he founds among the attendants to a synagogue on a Saturday. Out of mercy and kindness; for the glory of God; in order to be proven the power of the Son and of the Father. He sees her, He calls her, He heals her – everything in a hurry, with the lightning speed. The text of the evangelical recount isn't less concise or less rhythmed that that of the famous letter through which, from Orient. Caesar announced the Roman Senate: *veni, vidi, vici*.

There is, in this capacity of our Savior *to see* the others' suffering, to take heed at it, to *immediately* notice it, top focus on it, an immense mercy and in the same time a (human) sensitiveness speeding the heart's beats of the one who reads this *Gospel* (Lk. 13: 10-17), or the parallel pericopes: Matthew 12: 9-14; Mark 3: 105; Luke 6: 6-11 (all three of them referring to the man with a withered hand, or Luke 14: 1-6 (referring to the sick with dropsy) and to stir up within him unsuspected feelings of thrill and compassion. But soon, the greatness and the emotional strength of the scene evoked by Saint Evangelist Luke seem to be fading because of the venomous intervention of the chief of that place. As a rust, as a ringworm, as a leper that would attach to the clean surface of the skin, or of the wall, or of the metal, and it would defile it. Simultaneously to the anger to that chief are unveiled all the main characteristics of the Pharisees: the narrow and shortsighted legalist (which differs from legality and from its decent observation); that always succeeds in *diminishing the things*, the problems, the situations, the dilemmas, in reducing them to lilliputian proportions and to instill to them a spirit of pettiness, of avarice, or panic triggered by the imaginary or ridiculous dangers; the literal and small proceduralism, of the rheumatic archivist, who got old among the fading papers and among the moldy dossiers, with his eyeglasses tied with a string and with his torn sleeves, good only to mumble and to rebuke, upset, sour, stubborn; the persevering placing the letter above the ghost, the impossibility of surpassing of the helplessness of the literal level in everything (and especially in the important things), some sort of immobilization of the mind and of the soul on this level, on this lower step of the ladder that ascends towards freedom and understanding; the firm tendency of reacting, on each occasion, by swallowing the camel and carefully sifting the mosquito; the absolute hypocrisy, unhesitating, not ashamed by the world or by itself or by evidence of by common sense (the Lord shows that they do not hesitate to untie

and to water, on Sunday, their ox and their donkey, or in the other texts: to get out their sheep fallen into a pit of the ox of the son fallen into a well); the envy, the haughtiness, the evilness (their undivided and steadfast triad); the transformation of the Sabbath – of the queen-day, of resting, of celebration, and of benevolence into the Good God – in endless series of superstitions and paraphernalia, draconic interdictions and prescriptions, persecution and curse (we can really understand why they spoke about the curse of the Law: the Pharisees, as no others, they were masters in transforming the Law in a fairytale, and in transforming the Sabbath in a day of clashing and chocking); the absurd (for what can be more absurd than the sharp shouting and the virtuous gnashing of teeth of these legalists, who untie and water their oxen and their donkeys and they get out the caw fallen into pit or into well on a feast day, but they feel sick and they feel the world perishing and the sky falling because in their presence an unfortunate woman tied with the helplessness of being hunched, for 18 years, and who couldn't straighten herself up?).

Despite all these, somebody could ask himself, in good faith: why our Savior wants, by all means, to confront them? Why does He make these healings and miracles especially on Sundays and in sanctified places? Aren't these a provocation act? Don't they make us suspecting Jesus Christ finds pleasure by confronting them on Sunday and necessarily in synagogue, agitating them, not letting them alone?

The answer cannot be but one: of course He does that, by all means! Those are provocation acts, of willing confrontation and of well-thought defiance. Yes, He knowingly challenges them on Sunday and in synagogue, for He wanted the lesson to be as stinging as possible, the shaking to be harsher, the wakening up form numbness to be quicker. And because He understands to attack frontally, right upon the center of His adversaries and upon their most fortified point. Our Lord proved to be here a great strategist. Some kind of precursory of the famous theoretician of the military strategy, the Prussian general Carl von Clausewitz; the book of strategy was published by Clausewitz 1800 later than the Christ's life on earth, but Christ Who is One of Trinity knew that before being written. The attack – as von Clausewitz tells us – it can be most efficient there where the itself the enemy's strength is. the risk if big; but the surprise and the other aspects are bigger too, and in case of victory it is like the base of a fortified tower would collapse. (It is an act of courage, by all means: Christ didn't relent).

As a great and fearless strategist, as One Who knows that the defensive is better than offensive, but also as a good and unlazy doctor Who doesn't hesitate to intervene, to operate, to heal, He saw her and called her and healed

her. But He did that also as a decent man. Why wouldn't we do the good on Sabbath day? *Especially* on Sabbath day we should do the good by killing the logical fanaticism that passes from the notion of resting to the notion of non-intervention in the conflict between good and evil, between health and sickness. Why wouldn't we commit the good here and now, we urgently as possible? *Hit et nunc*! As the Latins said, without delay, without postponing, without hesitation, strikingly. Jesus Christ works always like this, hurried when it comes about having mercy, and He does it commanding, impatient, indignant: I am telling you, stand up, take your bed and walk, and to home, you are healed, dare! One could say that he trembles: because of how much the another's trouble hurst Him, because of how much the sickness and the helplessness irritate Him, so that He is in a hurry for setting back the things to their normal state, namely of health and of power. He surely keeps in mind the words from Joel 4: 10: "Let the weak one say: I am valiant!".

The Lord, a great strategist, an unhesitant doctor Who is also the Lord of the ability on the level of the human mind, for the argument with the ox, the donkey, the sheep, the son, the pit, and the well, it is as good as one can get and irrecusable. Our Lord is above any smallness, above the small envy, above the envy that has sneakingly entered the souls, above the proceduralism, above the pettiness showing up itself to the world shamelessly and claiming of being a wise scholar. The Lord is also a worthy servant of the Sabbath, for He reckons it as it should be: day of extolling, of joy, of as many as possible healings, of countless benefactions. A Sabbath of the health, of the abundance, ands of the good annunciations, one total far and totally hostile and totally stranger to the dry, gloomy, and tyrannical Sabbath of its false but zealous apologists: the Pharisees, the fanatics of the absurd logics, within whose heart, within whose mind cannot enter that little light, that small common sense, that crumble of mercy, without which any law letter becomes, unmistakingly, necessarily, and immediately in vinegar, hemlock, and haughtiness.

The Lord isn't so! Everything at the lord is only simplicity, kindness, compassion, and emergency in defeating the evil, the illnesses, the helplessness, and the suffering. And in the same time, everything at Him is towards gladness, towards getting out of troubles and out of annoyances. He is the Lord of the power, He is the Lord of the victories, He is the Lord of the tireless mercy and of removing the impediments contrived by some minds in the path of the freedom. (This is because the illness, just like the sin, it is slavery too). The Lord teaches us that we are and we must be free to do the good and to help our neighbor: no law, no regulation, no any form of anything,

no precaution or fear, no reason of the type “not to be said that…”, “not to seem that…” can be an impediment to us, or a pretext, of a justification.

What are the Pharisees interested in? To stuff themselves with foods, to round up their belly, and to widen their necks. The others? But what about the others can starve and be sinking into worries, troubles, and needs? It’s their business, let them manage as they can, as they know! Their purpose is that of bowing down before Pharisees, immediately as they see them showing up in the streets, as they hurry up towards the first places at feasts and in synagogues, and to sing them Hosannas on the very moment they open their mouth for speaking in order to burden them even more.

The Pharisees, of course, they would approve that general mentioned by the French writer Léon Daudet: when he came to inspect, far from the front line, a military hospital, he was stopped by the colonel commander of the hospital next to the bed where was lying an officer who lost his arms and legs in battle. The general looks attentively to the miserable trunk, as remained to the hero, and he seemed thinking profoundly at something. He came into his senses, of course, he refocuses, he prepares himself to utter some compassionate and extolling words… But no, he turned himself towards that colonel and asked: very well, why hasn’t he had a haircut, the regulation specifies that the hospitalized people must have their haircut!

Such Pharisaisms and bureaucratic errors (and they are from the same world as also the protest against the healings by word on Sabbath Day) are disgusting and appalling to the Christian. His Teacher didn’t preach the fewness, the reign of the letter, or the triumph of the details. The Lord of t multiplication of the bread and of the fish gave to the Christian only parables conceived by *a ghost* ready for bestowing the abundance, the joy, the thriving, and the health. On this last one there is no doubt that the Lord loved it; therefore, we can pray anytime for health and be convinced that Christ the Savior is also Christ the Healer, the One Who doesn’t love the sadness, the fewness, the poverty, and the isolation.

The pericope of the hunched woman (as also those of the man with a withered hand and of the sick with dropsy) shows Christ as a Victor. Especially here, in the evangelical text, the Pharisees turn out ashamed; the anger of the chief of that synagogue is bridled and shamed, while all the other participants and the hunched woman rejoice and extoll. The Lord’s adversaries were defeated, the bureaucracy has lost the game; the good, the health, and the gladness had consummately taken over the field where the battle took over. The entire scene is of a great dramaticism, and the – double – lesson is limpid: there always is the time for committing the good, immediately and without

delay, without invoking any motive not to do it, but both the mind and the eye to look there where the evil is, in order to abolish the evil; we constantly owe to stand against narrowness and evilness. In this episode of His earthly activity – where the Pharisees do not escape from with a clean face, but they are scattered, seemingly, like some upset and shivering owls, some damned jinxes – our Lord shows Himself to us as Jesus the Victor in the whole His greatness and healing and merciful power. In the joy of the present multitude and of the healed woman, it seems to me that it is reflected something of the light of Tabor and of the greatness of the Ascent.

**THE CASE ZACCHEUS**
**The 32nd Sunday after Pentecost**

*"Jesus, You Who have resurrected from dead,*
*Resurrect our souls too"*
(The Akathist of the Lord's Resurrection)

Zaccheus was a wicked man. We must be firmly convinced about this thing and we must have this thing firstly in our sight, if we want to interpret the evangelical text (Lk. 19: 2 and the followings) where Zaccheus is mentioned at. He was wealthy – this aspect is usually treated by commentators of this text. But we don't find the essence here. Not all the wealthy people are evil and merciless, and not all the poor people are kind and unenvious.

Zaccheus was a publican – lo his main trait. Publican, namely a servant of the Roman occupier, a traitor of his nation, a collaborationist – as such a person is called at our time, and just this term allows us to understand the situation as clearly as one can get. He sold himself to the occupiers o his country, he was serving them, he made himself their slave. That's why he was hated and despised, not because he was a wealthy man, but because he was a traitor and a trustee of a foreign and invader power, and he strived to provide that power with incomes, by collecting taxes by any means, and by unhesitatingly putting himself at that foreign power's disposal.

It is true that Zaccheus, immediately he changed himself, he took monetary decisions: he bestowed half of his wealth to the poor, and he declared that he will compensate fourfold those whom he done injustice to. But this because his thirst for wealth represented his major vice – the purulent abscess of an internal malady. So, on monetary way was manifested, in the first place, the transformation he underwent through. The healing preponderantly operated right on the most sensitized and infected place.

This is for in a few hours, Zaccheus not only had been healed on his love for money (which actually is consecutive to a larger pathology), but he became a different individual; there hadn't been gone only his love for money, but the very depths of his being had been shaken. And this is the wonder: the disappearance of the former man and the apparition of the new man.

And this too, generally speaking, it is the great and the amazing miracle of Jesus Christ. Not the healing of the men with palsy, or the mute, of the deaf, of the hunched, of the lepers, of the blind, of the moribund; not the multiplication of the bread, not the walking on the sea, not the healing of the

demonized, not even the resurrection of the death. The great and unparalleled miracle is this: the total transformation of the man committed by Him both while living on earth and after His ascent to heavens, along centuries, by the practically infinite string of martyrs, of saints, of converted, and of transfigured. It is the metanoia, which I call it: the total disintegration of the sinful man and his immediate metamorphosis in subject of sacrifice. Lo the most bewildering miracle worked by the Lord, an unparalleled one, one that surpasses all the other miracles, regardless how striking those ones would be. But metanoia, to him who knows what the live and the human nature are, it appears to be way above the defeating of the natural laws by our Savior. This is because the natural laws are deterministic, causal, and passive, and they obey their Maker, while the being is endowed with the gift of the thinking and with a free conscience and, in order to determine its transformation, the Divinity Himself has to face the right of free choice bestowed to the man. This time, the Divinity doesn't command, shortly, but He only acts on the way of the guiding grace.

There is needed in the moral world, from divinity, an energetic work subtler and more radical than in the physical world, more in the world of the freedom than in the world of the laws. Being so, Christ can make, after all, even out of the most addicted to sins man, a new man. Christ isn't only kind, and merciful and humble in heart, but He is powerful too (Lk. 5: 24) for healing all sorts of bodily illnesses, but these works fade in comparison to the great miracle of man's transformation. This transformation bears witness in an incontestable and irresistible manner for the almightiness and the divinity of The One working it. This is *for the Kingdom of God isn't in word, but it is in power* (1 Cor. 4: 20). Through the power-word of Christ (in the prophane philosophy Alfred Fouillée conceived forces-ideas), the former man dies, it is born a new man, alive into the Lord, a man got out from under the slavery of the sin and from under the mastery of satan, balanced by different psychic and ethical coordinates. There hasn't occurred some material element, nothing factic, not action on the realm of the creation: the full mystery occurs between sky and earth, within that magnetic space between those two supra-loaded cosmic conductors, in a trans-detectable area situated beyond any coercion or forcing, s values scale and a watchfulness of the thought. The man can now say: "The Lord pastured me and I will miss nothing. At pasture place, there He settled me; at the water of the resting, He fed me, He turned my soul, He will guide us on the ways of His justice" (Ps. 22: 1-3[42]), or he can conjugate at

[42] In KJB we have: Ps. 23: 1-3 (E. l. t.'s n.)

present tense: “You spread me with hyssop, and I will be cleaned; you wash me and I will be whiter than the snow” (Ps. 50: 8[43]).

The Lord’s power for recreating the former man and for creating out of him a new being, it was proven also by the calling of Levi-Matthew (a publican), or Saul-Paul on the road to Damascus, of Mary-Magdalene (or of the sinner woman or women), of the good thief on the cross. Almost the same happened the things with the Samaritan woman, the blind from birth, the demonized from the Gergesenes land, the tenth lepper, and other healed people who immediately followed Him, extolling Christ (without losing from sight, though, that in these last cases the metanoia can experience also explanative reasons, a human logic springing out of gratitude).

“So, if somebody is into Christ, he will be a new creature”, says the Apostle (2 Cor. 5: 17); the former man died together with his deeds. And we have put on the new man, by disrobing ourselves and by unburdening ourselves of our former living. Christ renews us totally, He dresses us up into the new man, He makes us sons of the light, as sign of recognition and spring of birth: “Disrobe yourselves of your previous living, of the former man, who is corrupted by the alluring lusts; and *renew yourselves* in the ghost of your life; and put yourselves on the *new man*, that one according to God, built up into justice and into the holiness of the truth” (Eph. 4: 22-24).

The Christ’s power is proven especially by *resurrecting the living*, by crossing them from darkness, form slavery, from despair, and from sinfulness, to freedom, to light, and to joy: “For you have disrobed yourselves from the old man together with his deeds and you have put on the new man, that is renewed, towards full knowledge, in the image of Him Who created him” (Col. 3: 9-10). The word “dressed” doesn’t refer to a superficial action, but it means “merging to”, being synonymous to “embodied”, as also in the striking formula: “As many of you have been baptized in Christ, you have also put Christ on”. Saint Apostle Paul underscores the “bath of the second birth through the renewal of the Holy Ghost” (Tit. 3: 3-7), and Saint Apostle Peter wrote: “Being *born again*... through the word of the living God and that remains forever” (1 Pt. 1: 23).

To the one dead in sins, the lord tells him: be alive; and He kidnaps him form under the mastery of the death in order to give him back to the life, and to the alive one He tells: die to this passing life in order you to be alive within Me.

Through baptism and repentance, Chrit recreates the former creature, the man of a world which apparently is the same, but which takes a totally

[43] In KJB we have: Ps. 51: 7 (E. l. t.’s n.)

different countenance for him whom his heart's eyes and though have been opened to. The true baptism is a holy and fearful mystery, by no means a simple ceremony, but it is the act making the baptized one another being. At any baptism the skies are opened, offering a holy and extraordinary joy. Proof to that are the feats mentioned by the *Gospels*, feats which always accompanied the conversions: in Matthew's house, in Zaccheus house... Instantaneity and gladness – lo the main characteristic of the rebirth. The feast – lo the natural accessory; the flood of happiness and of renewal – lo the immediate consequence. For all people the baptism works the same, at any age, on any cases when the second birth takes place, namely the birth by grace, spiritually. Blessed are they who haven't remain into darkness and who have seen the light, sooner of later.

The Ghost is fire and lightening, on each Christianization comes to existence a new sky and a new earth. The amazement, the joy, and the blessed tremble of Zaccheus weren't be less intense than those of Adam in the sixth day of the Creation, when he opened up his eyes and he contemplated the Creation.

Through baptism and metanoia (as putting on again the coat of the cleanness) it is proved the *power* of Christ. The Christianized little child (and this observation is valid also for the later converted to the faith in Christ) will no longer be a simple creature endowed with superior mental features the little child is reborn out of water and ghost, as the lord told to Nicodemus, sharply marking the difference between animality and humanity. The process of the renewal implies both the interior of the born one and the possibility of perceiving the moral world in another sense, as there would be removed veils, as there would be scattered darkness, and as there would occur unsuspected grounds of the universe.

Let's all of us thank, with deep emotion and with glad heart, that we belong to Christ, either since our birth or later, but all of us being born out of ghost, born form above, in the name of Christ Jesus, for eternity.

## SERMON ON THE SUNDAY BEFORE THE LENT

What as sermon is? Is it a lesson which, like a professor in his class, the priest or the monk gives it, and his listeners, like some students, they listen to it? I don't think so. The sermon isn't only a "teaching word", but it is also a profession of faith of the one uttering it, a confession of his that unveils his opinions, his nature, his personality. It is also a work for two, a collaboration, a work of the speaker and of the public, a creed uttered by two voices: one, rightly so, mute, but powerfully making its presence felt.

Being so, I am asking for your permission, today in the eve of the Lent, I to dare providing the "teaching word" with a more intimate character, in order it to be, at least partially, also a confession of some questions asked to the monk who is staying in front of you, and it to be a together-meditation upon the questions raised both by the evangelical text and the apostolic text of the day.

The root of the evangelical text is in the chapter no. 6 of the *Gospel according to Saint Matthew* and as foundation it has one of the great, noble, imperial features of our Lord: His discretion. We too are commanded to be discrete in three cases:

- when you give alms, says our Lord, let your left hand not to know what your right hand does. In other words, let your giving of alms to be known only to you, to the beneficiary, and to God;

- when you pray, our Lord also says, do not do it in publica spaces where the world can see and praise you, but do it only in your chamber, taking care of previously locking the door. Why should you lock yourself in? Lest somebody opens the door and finds you at prayer and so the secret of your deed will be lost;

- when you fast, our Lord tells us, do not take the example of the hypocrites by blackening your face and showing yourself sad in order the people to see that you are fasting, that it is hard to you, that you commit a feat that anyone can do it. On the opposite, we are called, when we fast, to wash our face and to anoint our head; namely, us to defy the burden of the fasting.

Lo the consummate discretion of our Lord: an undeviating and full discretion in doing the good.

Regarding the fasting that we are today especially interested in, let me remind you also an advice from Paterikon: rather than telling to others that you are fasting (to boast with your fasting, to proclaim it), it is more useful to you (monk or layman) to eat meat three times a day.

Passing now to the apostolical text – it is in the *Epistle towards Romans of Saint Apostle Paul*, in the important chapter no. 16 (to which Karl Barth too pays much attention in his ample study on this letter) – we ascertain that we firstly need to discern between the two sorts of commandments: absolute, and relative. The first ones are mandatory and indisputable. The other commandments do not have these characters, they rather belong to the custom of the place, to the rule of certain institution or to some realms or to the conviction of the individual.

Absolute are:

The ten commandments, namely the Decalogue received on Mount Horeb by Prophett Moses directly from the Almighty God.

Where does it turn out from that they are valid and mandatory to Christians, that they weren't only for Jews who were under the Law?

Right out of our Lord's words: the *Gospel according to Saint Matthew* (19: 16-17) shows that when a young man came to Him and asked Him: what good should I do in order I to have the eternal life?... Christ answers him: if you want to enter the life, keep the commandments. It is, therefore, clear that the commandments of the Old Covenant still are totally valid for the Christians as well.

A mandatory character present also the two great commandments referred by the Lord in the *Gospel according to Saint Luke* (10: 25-28). The teacher of law asking Him what he should to in order to inherit the eternal life, He asked him what is written in the Law. And when hearing the answer: "Love your Lord God from the whole your heart the whole your thought, and the whole your power (some texts say: your virtue, it is the same), and your neighbor as on yourself", Christ approves: you have answered rightly.

Therefore, these two commandments have an absolute character: Loving God with the whole our soul, the whole our heart, the whole our power, and the whole our thought, and our neighbor as on ourselves.

Finally, in the third place, it is absolute also the recommendation made by Christ to His Apostles at the Last Supper: "New commandment I am giving to you: Love on one another. As I have been loving you, you too love on one another".

We can ask ourselves: why the Lord accentuates: new commandment? Doesn't the Old Covenant specify the same thing (Levi 19: 18)? Haven't we seen previously that the double commandments specified also the love for our neighbor? Why, though, our Lord says a new commandment?

He does that because of our evilness and dryness. Our capacity of loving is so tiny, our stubbornness and our sourness from within our soul are so

dominant, that we sometimes are unable to love even on ourselves, let aside loving another! That's why our Lord doesn't want to let the love for our neighbor at the disposition of a feeling that can be totally absent from our psychic structure deserted by drought and aridness. As a role-model He gives us the love He proved for His apostles and for the entire mankind: a love than went all the way to the self-sacrifice on the cross. So, we owe to love on one another: not on the measure of our frail capacity of love, but all the way to sacrifice, as Christ loves us.

Now that we know that the difference between the absolute and relative commandments, we can proceed to analyze the chapter no. 14 from the *Epistle towards Romans*. In the verse no. 14 of this chapter, we find stated the guiding principle of the relative commandments. The Apostle writes: "I know and I am sure that nothing is defiled in itself, but only to him who thinks that something is defiled; to him it is defiled".

What does the Apostle of the gentiles say? That all the things, in themselves, they aren't at all defiled. But if I think in my thought and in my conscience that a certain thing or a certain deed are defiled, to me those ones are really defiled and I owe not to come close to that thing or to commit that deed. But if I don't think so, the thing and the deed not being at all defiled in themselves, I have not to forbid them to myself.

And Paul gives three clear examples of such relative commandments: the circumcision, the food, and the observing of the day (namely of the Saturday, of the resting day).

About circumcision, he declares (1 Cor. 7: 19): "The circumcision is nothing, and the non-circumcision is nothing too; but keep the God's commandments". This matter of the circumcision is no longer actual; but at the time when Saint Paul spoke and wrote, it was a subject of fierce and fiery discussion: was it needed that the men converted to Christianity to obey the Law and to get circumcised? The matter was solved in accordance with the principle of the relativity: the circumcision is a tradition without having and absolute character for the people from under the grace; consequently, it is not mandatory, and the circumcision or the non-circumcision do not have any importance, neither they imply any sort of soteriological consequences.

Likewise, the food: here too we are under the regime of the relativity. In the verses no. 3 and 6 of the same chapter no. 14, we are told as clearly as possible: "He who eats let him not despise him who doesn't eat; and he who doesn't eat, let him not condemn him who eat, for God has received him" and "He who eats, he eats for the Lord, for he thanks to God; and he who doesn't

eat, he doesn't eat for the Lord and he thanks to God". The text, so clear and so explicit by itself, it doesn't need any commentary.

Likewise, regarding the keeping of the Saturday. We read at the verse no. 6: "He who keeps the day, he keeps it for the Lord; and he who doesn't keep the day, he doesn't keep it for the Lord". Here too is applied the defiled-undefiled criterion.

What can we deduce out of all the three examples? That there are beside the absolute commandments other commandments too, which are called relative, and which depend on out thinking: we will keep them if according to our thinking doing otherwise will be defiled, and we won't keep them if within ourselves we don't attribute them and absolutely mandatory character.

And now we can pass to describe some cases of conscience specific to the monastic life, in order to give the countenance of a confession of the preacher to the todays' sermon, as I have announced it at the beginning. I am going to refer myself, briefly, to ten dilemmas.

1. The washing. There are monks thinking that washing themselves up is a sin for anyone form their ranks. They only wash their face and their hands.

According to the defiled-undefiled principle, they are free not to bath themselves. (Though out of the accusation addressed to Simon the leper, out of the fact that he was washing the feet of His disciples and out of the words "He Who bathed himself doesn't need to be washed but his feet" doesn't turn out that Christ would have stopped us form bathing). But they who think, as I do, that bathing isn't a defiled thing but it is a bodily need, they can take baths without remorse and without hesitation. From spiritual point of view, the bathing is nothing and the non-bathing is nothing as well. It is a question which any monk tries to solve it in his free conscience.

2. Also, cleaning up the chambers and the monastic cells. There are monks convinced that they owe not to grant to much importance to cleaning and tiding up their rooms. Very well, let them to do so, but without losing from their sight the fact that in the common chambers, which are places of freedom, one owes to keep a perfect cleanness, because I cannot forcedly impose my opinion to others: the freedom is the basis of the Christianity, and "in the house of My Father there are many places" (Jn. 14: 2). As such, in the kitchen, in the eatery, in the monastery's chancellery, in the toilets, let the rule be: the perfect cleanness. I cannot impose to others my personal conviction.

3. The length of the beard and of the hair, reckoned by many monks as a sign of improvement and holiness, it stays too under the empire of the relativity. The monks who, every now and then, they trim a little or they bring their beard and they hair in order, they won't be guilty at all. The length of the

beard isn't at all a proof of special spiritual features. It is, as the Catholics say, an indifferent thing. Of course, according to the Orthodox tradition, the monk owes to wear a beard, but its length and its width depend only on the benevolence of each monk. They don't signify anything, they are respectable, but without necessarily hinting at the consummation.

4. Similarly, the length of the vestments (of the reverend): this too has no importance or signification. It is a matter of strict aesthetics and comfort, solved by each individual according to his tastes and needs.

5. Some monks and many laymen seem to be convinced that by quickly marking themselves with as many as possible signs of the cross, they prove much piousness and they commit a spiritual deed.

But they are wrong. Marking with the sign of the Holy Cross in a hurry and hurry-scurry, it is not a decent thing. One owes to mark himself with the sign of the Holy Cros slowly, calmly, and without any hurry; let's avoid giving the impression that we are taking part to a speed contest. The serenity, the good order, the sense of piousness, they must be guiding us.: let's not make banal, let's not make a bagatelle, let's not disregard the sign of the Holy Cross by marking in hastily, by conveying to others the sensation of an automatism and artificiality.

6. Not sewing in Friday, as many pious women think that there is an absolute commandment, it really is but a custom, if not a superstition too. The Friday is the day of our Lord's crucifixion and therefore is good to us eating food for fasting (or even eating nothing) and us to stop ourselves form pleasures. But sewing is not a pleasure.

Non-sewing on Friday has no ground. Who, of course, thinks in his thought that he must not sew, let him not sewing; but let him neither get offended seeing that others sew on Friday. As also regarding the keeping of the day and of the eating must not despise the other side who do the opposite.

7. Some monks imagine that they manifest their monastic state and the holiness of their life with the help of some frown gazes and of a sad face. They forget about what the *Paterikon* and the *Lives of the Saints* tell us about Anthony the Great, the hermit, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, the glory of the Orthodoxy, Saint Moses the Black who was a former thief, and about many others: they were glad, serene, having their faces always luminous and being always glad for receiving guests. (Let's remind about Abbot Zosimus too, of Dostoyevsky, who was, at his turn, unfrown). The true monk (or better said the true Christian) cannot be frown and sour: isn't him the disciple of The One Who gave the world the good annunciation? How can him, therefore, be upset?

One must not commit, of course, any exaggeration of contrary sense: the serenity and the light are not allowed to become bad-taste-gladness, chat, uncontrolled exuberance. The right-reckoning is here too our most trustful guide.

8. We know about music that in Muntenia, Moldova, and Oltenia, they mainly sing psalmist music; in Transylvania and in Maramures they sing mainly Cuntan.

Neither of them can claim the prominence. We remind to them who invoke the tradition that Palestrina, Haydn, Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven – authors od sacred music – worked, at their time, under the sign of the innovation. And on contemporary composers as Messiaen or Paul Constantinescu (the author of some beautiful oratories on Easter and on Christmas) we cannot blame of disregarding the tradition. Even Roman the Melode, the initiator of the churchly music, he too was a composer of new music.

Classic, modern, psalmist, Cuntan-style, the music depends only on the auditive sensitivity of the ones listening to it and on its capacity to enter the resonance with their souls. In many churches from the United States, Great Britain, and from other places, they serve in church on folk, jazz, of other rhythmed kinds of music. The whole word "Jesus Christ Superstar" is built on folk music and on themes of Disneyland-jazz; and that doesn't impede to be a work of powerful intensity and Christian fervor. The Catholic church of Saint Severin from Paris, it shelters the newest instrument of the hot music.

Let's not wonder about that, let's not be offended, let's not be scandalized, in order us not to experience what *Queen* Micol, the daughter of King Saul and the wife of King David did: seeing her husband going and dancing and singing in front of the Lord's Ark of the Covenant, so that she thought he was showing up, that he was a laughing stock and a discussion subject, and that he resembled to the bums. She didn't understand, poor her, that David sang and danced out of his overfull love for God.

Any music bestowed with the feature of inciting the hearing of the believers and elevating their soul is good and sacred.

9. The things are similar also regarding the diverse languages. The Greek language isn't holier that the Latin language, and Latin isn't superior to Greek. The Christian from Occident focused their souly life around Rome and they adopted the Latin; the believers from Orient focused their spirituality around Byzantium and they adopted the Greek language. Neither of the two languages owns any intrinsic superiority. The case is the same for: Hebrew, Syriac, Slavonic, Coptic etc. God is, as Saint Apostle Paul establish it, that language

that allows the attendants to follow the religious service and to strengthen their piousness.

Neither the diverse alphabets can justify any priority. The nuns from our country still use the book written in Cyrillic, thinking that those books are "holier". They can use those books, but they are wrong imagining that the alphabet they prefer owns a hidden power, some special sacrality.

The Latin alphabet is simpler. They organized the following experiment: a man who knew both alphabets, he was given to read the same text written both Cyrillic and Latin letters. He read the last ones more quickly. The Latin letters can be distinguished more easily.

The alphabet, as the Calendar too, they are tools. Let's not fall into the mistake of the stylists who talk about "our holy calendar" and who, rightly so, Father Archimandrite Ilie Cleopa told them that they could equally speak about the "holy broom", which also is a simple tool.

10. In the rule of the Holy Impartation there are differences between Muntenia, Oltenia, and Moldova on one hand, and Maramures on the other hand. In Maramures, after they receive the Holy Impartation, the people kneel down, while in the other parts of the country they stand, based on the consideration that by receiving the Body and the Blood of the Lord they have become bearer of God, theophorous, and therefore what would be the purpose of kneeling anymore?

I for one think this reasoning as right. But what do I do? When I receive the Holy Impartation in Bucharest, I stand as everybody does; and when I receive the Holy Impartation in a monastery in Maramures, I kneel as everybody else does. Important is us to receive the Holy Impartation with faith, with love, with fear, with piousness, with tremble, and with cleanness. The fact that after receiving it we stand or we kneel, it has not importance at all: the criterion here cannot be else but the good custom of the place.

Out of the evangelical text from today we have drawn the beautiful teaching of the discretion. To the apostolical text we owe the understanding of the essential difference between the absolute and the relative commandments, the urge not to give absolute character to some customs, to some forms, and to some personal sufferings. It is a good and all-nice thing for the man to attend the church, to light up some candles, to bow before the holy icons, to make some prostrations too. But that is by no means enough. We are required to always have Christ next to us, in our thought, in our soul, in our deeds, and in our behaviors.

Christ didn't come into the world to teach us a series of new forms, but to propose us a new way of life. Not he who tells Me Lord, Lord, will enter the

Kingdom of God – says our Savior - but he who fulfills the will of the Heavenly Father. Not in Jerusalem on or Mount Gerizim you owe to pray, he says, but everywhere, in ghost and truth.

Let's, therefore, get close to the Lent with great humbleness, by understanding that it isn't but a worldly and very modest way of advancing towards Christ. if we restrain ourselves form some sorts of foods, but without accompanying our fasting with our endeavor of improving and spiritualizing on ourselves, of transforming our inward being (in order to make of it, as Saint Apostle Paul says, a new creature, for Christ really can make of each of us such a new creature), our fasting cannot be regarded but like a discarded rag. Only by accompanying the fasting, namely the abstention from food, with spiritualization, with improvement, and with inward transformation, we will give to our fasting the character of a-good-fragrance-sacrifice which makes it received by That One Whom we love and Whom we believe in.

## SERMON ON THE FOURTH SUNDAY FROM THE LENT

The rule of the churchly typicon specifies that on this fourth Sunday from lent to be read the *Pericopes from Matthew* 4: 25-35, and from *Mark* 9: 17-23.

I am asking you for permission in this short teaching word to tarry upon the text from the *Gospel according to Saint Mark*, but adding to the mentioned text one more verse, the 24th. This is because this verse seems essential to me and it is of such a nature that allows us to unveil, partially, the mystery of the faith, that will constitute the theme itself of our today's speech.

The faith, as it turns out from numerous places of the *Holy Scripture* and out of the exegeses of its main commentators, it appears to us as a mystery and as a paradox. The act of faith is presented to us as a mystery and as a paradox – more acutely and more mysteriously than anywhere else – at Mark 9: 24. This is for the answer of the father to the rebuking of our Lord (He drew father's attention that all the things are possible to him who believes): "I believe, Lord! Help my faithlessness!", it is not less contradictory and undecipherable than "the puzzling problem" knows as Cretan's logics. All the Cretans are liars, that is the premise which it starts with; it is affirmed by a Cretan. Once he is a Cretan, it means that he too liars and therefore his affirmation isn't true, in other words, not all Cretans are liars. But if the Cretan is asked: are all Cretans really liars? And if he gives a negative answer, what will us deduce from there? That, being himself a liar too, as all Cretans are, his negative answer means that, actually, all Cretans utter untruths. Let one save himself if he could!

This logical paradox fought the philosophers along centuries. This matter is exposed in details by the Romanian logistician Anto Dimitriu in one of his studies published in the year 1965, in the volume *Science and Knowledge* (1984). I'm not going to present it in details and I'm neither going to show how the contemporary specialists reach to find a solution to this problem by using the theory called as of the levels of logical speaking.

WE are going to mention here only the fact that the phrase uttered by the father of the child, in the verse no. 24 from the chapter no. 9 of the *Gospel according to Mark* it is not else but another paradox endowed with all the appearances of the insolvability. This is because: either you believe – and then, to what avail do you ask for faith to be bestowed to you, or you don't believe – and then how dare you saying, shamelessly, "I believe"? What sort of faith is this, one that is and that isn't, one that is affirmed but also admitted as needing help? What a too subtle of exceeding hypocritical game is being played

here? Doesn't the answer confirm the argumentation of the atheistic philosopher Jean Paul Sartre who blames the believers of being ill-faithed because the text from Mark 9: 24 proves right this: the incertitude, the frailness, the inward duplicity of the claimed act of steadfast faith? To Sartre and to the existentialists from his school, the faith cannot be but a confuse language, as self-delusion (self-suggestion), a baseless word (meaning that covering provided by the gold from the banks' deposits cover the paper money) or, simply, an untruth (unconscious or, more often, ill-faithed).

The *Gospel*'s text from today reminds us, though, not only about the accusation formulated by Sartre, but also about another famous saying of the philosopher Blaise Pascal, a French too. He, a precursor to existentialism, not an atheist, but profoundly Christian, he attributes to our Savior who addresses Himself to the believer who is eager to believe, but who doesn't succeed in fulfilling his desire, and who doesn't dare to take the decisive step, a totally unexpected answer: you wouldn't search for Me if you didn't find Me! A terrible answer, paradoxical, mysterious, and dizzying. Searching for that what you have already found! You searching, your endeavor, you anguish aren't but the proof of the inutility of all your restlessness – and even of your blindness – once you have searched the Searched One! (But, also, what a joy: the drachma was in the pocket, the lost sheep was but a mistaken counting!).

A terrible answer, paradoxical, and mysterious, though equally clarifying and definitive, bringing forever an end to the validity of the temptations of a logic of the stringent dilemmas. We are asked only for the courage of ascertaining that the man who is restless, tormented, obsessed with the vocation of his faith, he has become, by itself his searching state, a believer. He who starts walking towards Christ – and how long, how meandrous, how uncertain that path appears to him – He has already met Him! Hasn't He *while the man was still far, see the man and, running towards the man, hasn't* He embraced the man, kissing the man?

Sartre, besides, he admits that that one who goes and asks for the advice of an officer, if he should follow the military carrier or not, he has already made his decision. Similarly, the man exposing his doubts regarding his ecclesial vocation, to a priest, he has already chosen: he wouldn't ask for the approval of a servant of Christ if he didn't find Christ.

A recent and edifier case of that of our illustrious compatriot Eugen Ionesco, a writer in Romanian and in French, who lives for more than 40 years in France and who is a member of the French Academia. He was, for most of live life, totally stranger to religious preoccupations. But in time, the problem of the existence of God has been gradually imposing to him, increasingly

perseveringly, more powerfully, and, seemingly, more impatiently. Attentively reading the Holy Fathers and the mystery of the phenomenon that seemed to him as the strangest in the universe – the light – they have been gradually bringing him (with difficulty, and not without going-backs, without resistances, without surges of the despair in intervals which the victory seemed to belong to the depression in) closer to the craved-for faith in God. Lo that now, at old age (he was born in the year 1912, as I was too) he has done the gesture equivalent to the burning of the bridges left behind by the army who doesn't want any more to know how to *withdraw*. "He has declared himself", as Jean Girardoux liked to say. In his recent book *La quête intermittente* (I would translate the word *quête* by a complex of terms: investigation, research, way, searching, pilgrimage), published at the end of the last year, after he exposes, as openly as one can get, his long trip towards Christ, he ends it by affirming his faith, still nuancing it though, with the verb *to hope*. Whom I am believing in? – he says. And, as a great dramaturgist as he is, he formulates a short answer based on one of the theological virtues: In Jesus Christ, I hope!

Now that the author unveiled his faith, please allow me to divulge that, back in the year 1980, at Paris, he asked me to pray for him so that God to bestow him the grace of the faith. In the mentioned volume he also asks himself, full of worries and according to the exigency that characterizes him: do I only think that I believe? Isn't my faith an appearance, an illusion, a contrivance of my tired mind, a wishful thinking, namely a certitude having is foundation in an aspiration of the spirit, in the individual's will, in some sort of dreaming, in an unreality taken as reality?

I allowed myself to write to Eugen Ionesco and tell him that the formula "but maybe I only think that I believe" is the Pascal's the variant to the text from Mark 9: 24. "Maybe I only think that I believe" is the same with: "You wouldn't search for Me if you didn't find Me", and with: "I believe, Lord! Help my faithlessness!". Eugen Ionescu has nothing to be afraid or ashamed of, for he joins some great artists and thinkers defeated by Christ: Dostoyevsky, Claudel, J. K. Huysman, Bergson, Péguy, Werfel, Papini, Chesterton.

But we must give one more answer to the encryption of the fundamental verse no. 24, by decoding it from practical point of view. How can we overcome the critical point, the incertitude, the blame of being ill-faithed, how can we take the leap from faithlessness, from blindness, and from inward restlessness, to faith, to serenity, and to firmness? The road I is given to us (in the old meaning of this syntagm, that one preferred by Constantin Noica: *it shows* it to us) the same verse no. 24: "*And immediately shouting out, the father of the child said with tears*".

Lo the key, lo the cypher, lo the solution. Itself the inferiority of our decayed human condition submit even the faith to incertitude, to the fluctuations, to acedia, to crossing through dark periods. We are zealous but also weak beings, anytime exposed to stumble, if not even to falling. Didn't Fer. Filip Nerri say: Hold me by my ears, Lord, because otherwise I will sell You like Judah did! But if we *shout out*, as the father of the demonized child did, if we really *pray with tears*, in other word from the depths of our being, if we realize that we are only some frail reeds and some smoking wicks, we will get out of the trap of our pride, out of the torment of the incertitude, and out of the labyrinth of the paradoxes. The father's shouting out accompanied by tears is, in the first place, an act of *humbleness*: he admits and he confesses the wickedness of the human condition; his haughtiness no longer impeded him from asking for the help of his interlocutor. By humbleness, by tears, and by prayer, he (and everyone together with him) passes from the complex state (dubious, burdening) of faith-faithlessness, to the state of steadfast-faith.

What does this prove? That one need the grace. The human being isn't enough strong for getting out on his own from paradox, from dispersion, and from fluctuation. But it is widely open to the human being the gate of the humbleness (prayers + tears + "shouting"); the humbleness leads to faith, unlike the locked-up gate of the great and tragical Kafka (for whose salvation I doubt that Pascal and Kierkegaard and Dostoyevsky wouldn't have prayed).

Now that Mircea Eliade died, I can confess that he too asked me the same thing as Eugen Ionesco did. He wanted to be not only – as Emil Cioran called him – the most active propagandist of God but also a humble servant of God. This unmatched historian of the religions craved for being, according to the model of Claudel ("a poet at the foot of the Cross"), rather than the narrator of an evolution: to be entrusted that the history of the religious sentiment ends up on Golgotha. His modesty, hie kindness, and his generosity were preparing him for that.

Regarding another illustrious representative of my generation (I and Eliade were students at the same high school from Bucharest: Spiru Haret), namely Constantin Noica, I am sure, according to the things I heard from His Eminence Metropolitan Antonie Plamadeala at the burial service on a serene and gentle winter day, in the immediate vicinity of the hermitage from Paltinis, that my great friend and benefactor, father of Orthodox monk, he died reconciled with God. I believe that to all three of them too, as in the today's pericope, the Lord answered them healing: of worries on Eugen Ionesco, on

darkness and farness on Eliade[44] and on Noica. This is for they shouted out, each one in his style, in the language of their specific intellectuality, according to the matrix of his talent and according to the tonality of his heart: I believe God, help my poor human faithlessness.

And I am still daring to believe that to the whole of my generation – who has been taking seriously the life, who has been despising the hypocrisy, and who have been hoping, mistaking, and suffering – God will how again not His just and harsh Face, but His gentle and merciful Face.

Let is be to all of us useful the things recounted by me – maybe too personally and too loosely. Let's strive to constantly strengthen our faith, no matter how steadfast we would reckon it, by our humbleness, by calling upon the sweet Name of Jesus, by preserving in the deep of our self of the most intimate parable recorded by Saint Evangelist Mark in the chapter no. 9 of his *Gospel*, which is a true corner stone of the Christianity.

[44] Later on, we all could find that Eliade died after confessing his sins and after receiving the Impartation.

## THE ADMIRATIONS OF THE LORD

Our Lord, most often, He acts (He heals and He gives back the life) out of mercy (on the widow from Nain, on the hunched woman, on the man with a withered hand, on the blind, on the leper, on all sorts of ill people, demonized or suffering). But there are – as much as I am aware of – in the content of the *Gospels*, seven cases where the urge for working the miracle isn't the mercy, but it is a totally different (and surprising) feeling, namely the admiration! The admiration felt by the Son of God for a temporary and frail human being.

1. The case of the Roman centurion (Mt. 8: 5-10; Lk. 7: 2-10), whose much beloves servant He healed it instantly and from distance, out of admiration for the centurion's faith and humbleness. (The faith: "but You only tell with the word and my servant will be healed"; the humbleness: "Lord, I am not worthy of receiving You under my roof…"). Consequently, the admirative ascertainment of Jesus: "Verily I am telling you: at nobody, in Israel, I have found so much faith".

2. The case of the man with palsy from Capernaum, borne by four individuals, on a bed, in order to bring him in front of the Lord. Not being they able to enter the house where he was, because of the multitude, they undone the roof and they lowered the bed through the roof. "Seeing their faith", the text tells us, namely actually *admiring* the friendship of the companions for the man with palsy, their devotion, their perseverance, their skillfulness, their assertiveness, Jesus heals the man with palsy (Mt. 9: 2; Mk. 2: 3; Lk. 5: 18).

(Of course, they didn't break the roof and they didn't drop the tiles upon the people from inside, but – probably – they opened the hatch that in the houses from Orient led to the terrace from above the building, but that job too should have been very difficult because of supposing to pass the bed through such a narrow opening and to cross through such a crowded space, while carrying a rigid body… everything represent a *performance* which triggered the admiration of the Healer).

3. The case of the Cananean woman (Mt. 15: 22-28).

For how much faith, endeavor, self-control, decency, and bright intelligence (her answer combined the humbleness, the wisdom, the sapience, and the ability on a mental level of a totally superior order) she manifested, the Lord – impressed and admiring her – rewards her by telling her (only to her, among all the people He addresses to in the *Gospels*): Oh! Woman! *Great* is your faith! The vocative "Oh!" and the adjective *Great* do not appear in any similar cases. And, in the same say, the words *be it to you as you wish*, which

keep the place for the usual formula: *be it to you according to your faith*. Of course, the result is the same, by the nuance is significative).

The is no doubt that the Lord is charmed by the Cananean woman's behavior and that, at the end, He talks to her with an amazed admiration, the consequence being the use of the three totally special mentions: *Oh!*, *great*, and *as you wish*.

4. The case of the woman anointing Him with chrism (Mt. 26: 7-13; Mk. 14: 3-9; Lk. 7: 37-48; Jn. 12: 3-8).

On the disciples scandalized by the waste (St. John shows as scandalized and undignified only on Judah, but at Matthew it is said that all the discipled got angry, and at Mark we find out that "some of them" were upset), the Lord rebukes them: "Why do you cause (and this plural comes to support the affirmations from Mark and Matthew) upset to the woman? For she has done a kind thing to Me". And on the woman, also by using an admirative-grateful tonality, He rewards her with the *immortality*, for He declares that: "Wherever this *Gospel* will be preached, all over the world, it will be told what she has done, towards her remembrance". Out of these words, one can easily deduce His admiration.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will *see* God" (Mt. 5: 8).

5. But the most striking case, without any doubt, it is that of the blind from birth (Jn. 9: 1-38) rewarded by Christ as He did to nobody else.

But why is that? For the healed blind behaved nicely and fully courageously, and showed himself dignified and grateful, and he defended The One Who healed him, he confronted the Pharisees and because of that he was rebuked, offended, and banished away, suffering, therefore, as a servant and as a confessor of Jesus Christ.

Therefore, the Lord wants to reward him. But how? With what? On what way?

He has no gold and silver.

He gave him the sight. What more precious thing one could bestow? We could imagine our Lord looking around, thinking what He could bestow to the fearless and worthy man who is now in front of Him. What sign of admiration for the perfect stance than man manifested? He confronted the Pharisees. He didn't' consent to declare that his Benefactor was a sinner, as they wished. He told to them who kept repeating that they didn't know where That One was coming: this is the wonder, that you don't know where He is from but He has given me my sight. They mocked him, they menaced, him, they threw him out, but he remained steadfast.

The Lord, as we understand, sems like *feeling the need* not to let than man unrewarded, the need for showing His admiration. But how? On what way? By what?

And then, by keeping searching, he conceives a truly extraordinary idea in His godlike-human mind. And He does an extraordinary thing, a gesture equivalent (on prophane plan) to that of a king who, on the battle field, unchained from his neck or he gets out form on his chest, a collar or a badge and attach it to the chest of a valiant man, or, in case of Buddha, when he was a hare, in one of his countless avatars, he threw himself in fore in order to be able to feed the tired brahman who come to see him. Or, also in the case of a woman who, out of her gratitude for a man, because of not having what to bestow him, she bestows on herself to him.

So did the Lord too, because of not having what to bestow him, He *bestowed on Himself* to the former blind man, by *unveiling on Himself* as God. He *shows on Himself* to him, He *unveils on Himself* to him, He *confesses His godhead* to him. "You have already seen Him! And The One talking to you, That One is".

Lo the gift, as expensive as one can get.

Lo the act that seems to me the most admirative among all the act committed by Christ on this earth, one maybe expressing an even bigger admiration than that for the Cananean woman. Not having what to give him, he unveils on Himself to him, He unveils His identity, He gets out of anonymity and – as supreme homage – He tells him Who He is.

What unparalleled else could He offer him than this repetition of the scene from Tabor: Christ, to the former blind man, He manifests anew His godhead, whither than the snow, brighter than a thousand of suns, namely he shows him the Greatness, the Splendor, and the Absolute, that *Ding an sich* reckoned by Kant ad impossible to be revealed. The dialogue between Jesus and the former blind man also recapitulates the unveiling done to Mose on Horeb: *I Am What I Am* (Exod. 3: 14).

But one may invoke Petr and Martha. Rightly so, He didn't hide either to them "the thing in itself", but to them He only confirmed the answer to an asked question. While to the former blind man the Lord, out of His own initiative, as a *gift*, He unveils on Himself, He "bestows" Himself to him. He disrobed His worldly clothes and His human countenance, and He offers God to him towards contemplation.

We can also ask ourselves: Why did Christ give the sight to that man whom we know about that neither him nor his parents committed any sins? In order him to see the wordily things, the phenomenal world? Of course, but

especially in order him to see the God face-to-face, as it wasn't bestowed to Moses or to Elijah: On Christ-God disrobed of all His earthly attributes. Therefore, also the healed man bowed to the ground in front of Him.

6. To the good thief (Lk. 23: 40-43), the Lord rewards his generosity, his extraordinary capacity of getting out of himself (according to itself His advice): on the Cross and enduring atrocious torments, the thief still finds the time, the patience, and the power to defend another, to rebuke the evil thief, to admit his guilt, and to ask for the help of the Innocent. He confesses his sins, he humbles himself, he proves his partaking to the pain of his neighbor. The reward is proportional to the manifested altruism: he is promised, in the same day, the Paradise.

7. There is also the case of the woman from Samaria, parallel to that of the blind from birth: "I Am, The One talking to you" (Jn. 4: 26). Only that beside the Jacob's fountain, the Lord doesn't reward, but He ends a discussion which I dared to liken it to a duel see *The Living Water*). The Lord admires to the Samaritan woman a nature that is strong, stubborn, courageous, ironical, proud, intelligent, and quarrelling; and He admired also her non-reticent, openly, if not even brazing way of speaking. He admires, I think, her personality.

In the mentioned text I wrote: "The Samaritan woman is an admirable example of the way which the Lord works in, in His quality as hunter (of people). He is especially attracted to the difficile game, to disciples *with personality* who resist Him, but who also are able to *even now* (not after a day of an hour of a quarter of an hour) to surrender themselves to Him into ghost and truth. He liked a persecutor as Saul of Tars, a passionate debauched as Mary the Egyptian, an evil publican as Zaccheus, a quarreling woman as the Samaritan woman; He didn't like the pale faces, the executioners, the whiny, the sifters of the mint and of the cumin, the hypocrites, the bearers of long coats with tassels, the zealous lighteners of candles. He loved Simon Peter for he belonged to the type of the fiery, unexpected, and impatient individuals".

Still, in the case o the one who will become Saint Photini, the unveiling isn't only the result of the admiration but rather a fighting tactic, the modality of winning and of giving the "deadly blow". The Samaritan doesn't find mercy, she is defeated. So that the unveiling done to him who suffered because of being healed and then because of being "stubborn" it appears to us as being, I am repeating myself, the most admirative thing done by our Lord on this earth of ours, where he mainly cherished the courage, the faithfulness, the steadfastness, the gratitude, the "elegance", the "stance", the refusal of denouncing, of selling your friends, and of selling on yourself for a bowl of

lentils, the will of not defiling yourself by committing wicked and worthless deeds, namely, in reality, that what is noblest, and I would call it also glorious: within us: that little part of divine spark dwelling within all of us – whoa re sons of God on the measure in which, by ourselves, we don't hurry to surrender on ourselves to the darkness and to the abomination.

## SAINT PROPHET ELIJAH

Saint Prophet Elijah – whom we are informed about, in details, in the *Old Testament*, I in the chapter no. 17-22 from the *Third Book of the Kings*[45] and in the chapter no. 1-2 from *The Fourth Book of the Kings*[46], and whom the *New Testament* repeatedly refers to (for instance: Mt. 16: 14; 17:" 11-12; Mk. 8: 28; Lk. 4: 25-26; 9: 8 and 19), both John the Baptism and Christ Himself being regarded as reappearances of the old prophet – he is presented to us as "a mountain man" (he is from Thisbe of Gilead, the mountainous situated between Jordan and the Arab Desert) and having a countenance of a harsh and fierce ascetic, just like Saint John the Baptist, whom he is likened in *The New Testament*. He wears a long hair, he wears a leather girdle around his waist, he wears a coat of sheep skin – some sort of a long, sleeveless coat, specific to the shepherd from the mountains. He has quick moves, he is sharp in speaking, his behaviors and gestured give an impression of him that can be summarized by terms as: fire, thunders, lightenings, anger, and wrath.

This man, with such a savage countenance, he doesn't behave with half-measures or with gloves. He is a one-piece man, and he has a warrior nature. He speaks openly, he stops the rain for three and a half years, he brings the hunger in the country and he stabs at once no less than four hundred and fifty priests of Baal, after he thoroughly derided them for their vain invocation of their god, because they jumped around the altar and they stabbed on themselves with swords and spears: "shout out louder… maybe your god is talking to somebody, or he maybe is occupied with something or he is traveling, or he is sleeping: Shoiut out louder so that he awakes!" (3[47] Kings 18: 27).

Zealous as nobody else, for Lord Sabaoth (that is interpreted as the Lord of the hosts), he doesn't' spare on himself, he equally knows hot to obey and to give commandments, he enjoys the gift of working wonders, he resurrects the dead child of the widow from Sarepta of Sidon, and he is given to stay on Mount Horeb in front of the divinity's face who unveils to him not as an earthquake or as a storm, but in the divinity's most mysterious and subtle hypostasis: as a smooth breeze[48].

Elijah hates the lie, the hypocrisy, the injustice, and he doesn't know what means: the weakness, the compromise, the euphemisms, the lukewarm

[45] In the King James Bible, we have: 1 Kings. (E. l. t.'s n.)
[46] In the King James Bible, we have: 2 Kings. (E. l. t.'s n.)
[47] See the previous two footnotes.
[48] Natural to our human logics would have been that to such a man, the Lord to manifest Himself violently, but the cosmic paradox wanted the impetuous Elijah to see God as a gentle and serene power.

phrases, and the insinuations. To Ahab and Isabella – the wicked pair of the Israel's Kingdom, "the most tyrannical and beasts-like masters" (I am using here the qualificatives they are called with in *The Akathists of the Mother of the Lord*) – he announces them, directly, what death will they die off: the dogs will lick Ahab's blood and they will eat Isabella too. And it was so.

Especially the persecution and the hypocrisy make him mad. Isabella is not only a wicked, a thief, an enemy of the people, btu it is also an unmatched liar, an addicted hypocrite who wants to be what she isn't and she claims to be what she shouldn't even thing at. In order to steal from and to destroy the poor Naboth, in order to steal his vineyard and his land, this false pious ordered to the people to fast before uttering some false witnesses, so that she paired the lawlessness with the mocking of that sacred custom, she the wicked and the worthless, by claiming to be herself a saint. And what can be more pitiful, more ridiculous, and more revolting, than claiming that you are that what everybody knows that you aren't and then pretending and imposing they to recognize you as such! In order to fools up the people, in order her to be acclaimed as pious, this crazy woman, discontent with cynically perpetrating the crookedness, she wants also to justify herself, but she only succeeds in proving herself as a big specialist in scenography, in fake-law-suits, and in condemning with legal forms – but totally procedural ones – innocent people.

This trap set against Naboth – in order to deprive him of his ancestral land, of his vineyard, of his patch of country – premeditated, organized, carefully and in details crafted, this endeavor for conferring an act of theft some aspect of respectability and legality, it cannot but irritate to the bottom of his entrails a man who cannot stand - by his nature – any hypocrisy and lie. Scandalous and disgusting at Ahab and Izabella – a pair unseparated in wickedness – it especially is the lie, the daring deceit, the tendency of fooling the people out, the zeal for pursuing their main goal: making the people to believe some vain words, some lies, rather than believing the very reality.

Ahab and Isabella seem to exemplify the Romanian saying attributed to the wicked woman: Do not believe, my husband, what you see with your eyes, but believe what I am telling you.

Elijah cannot stand either the betrayal of the true God. When Ahaziah, the descendant of Ahab, he is sick and asks for help Baal-Zebub from Ekron, how does the prophet behave to the king's envoys whom he meets on their way? He burns them twice with the fire from the sky: twice on the chieftains and twice on the fifty men sent there. Who should Ahaziah ask for help? Isn't there God in Israel?

Essential to Elijah is his behavior towards the liars, the persecutors, and all sorts of lawless. He always speaks openly and harshly, always steadfast into righteousness and in a punisher and unbiased God. He doesn't know about sparing, about joke, about lenience: may the fire burn you; the gods will eat you! This is the style, and the style, as we know it from Buffon and Blaga, it represents itself the man's nature. Elijah doesn't ever resort to paraphrases, to meanders. He doesn't allow to be persuaded, conquered, allured, deceived, frightened, bribed. He cannot care less about all of those. He distinguished between good and bad, you cannot fool one like him, you cannot delude him with crafted discourses and lies; he believes what his eyes see, and not what he is told to believe, he condemns the evil, he stays against evil in hid deed, he doesn't overlook the evil, he aims at the center, at the source of the disaster, at the ill-faithed and birth-giver to disasters ruler pair of Ahab and Isabella, who are the cause of all disasters and misfortunes, the merciless enemies of their own people, whom they mock of, whom they burden and persecute, by ceaselessly using all sorts of liar speeches and transparent tricks.

Elija ends his life of miracle-worker, of prophet, of "man of God" (as he is unanimously called), of fiery and fearless fighter and partisan of the good, of the justice, and of the truth (and he took as rightful disciple and "coat" bearer of his, the no less zealous than him Elijah) according to his style of being and of acting. He is elevated to the sky, being alive, in a chariot pulled by fire-horses and in a vortex of wind: he who through his prayer and zeal for One God burnt the worthless with fire from above, and he convinced God to descend fire in order to consume the unjust sacrifice, towards the shame and the perdition of the idolaters. Tireless, fisty, relentless, he departs – by the mercy of the Almighty – form this world just like he spoke: in torrent and in glory. The clay isn't allowed to comprise him and to break him. He is taken to the skies in full vigor and petulance, as a good soldier of God and as a valiant forerunner of the Baptist, as one destined to be the heralder of the second coming of Christ.

Three are the characters who, doubtlessly, make the connection between *The Old Testament* and *The New Testament*. Theya re: John the Baptist, the last prophet of *The Old Covenant*; Isaiah, the "evangelist of *The Old Testament*"; Eljah identified by our Lord Jesus Christ to John (Mt. 11: 13-14: "All the prophets and the Law prophesized until John. And if you want to understand it, he is Elijah, the one to come". *Id.*: Mt. 17: 10-13; Mk. 9: 11-13), who talks to the Lord on Mount Tabor at the *Transfiguration* (Mt. 17: 3; Mk. 9: 4; Lk. 9: 30) and who is evoked on Golgotha (on the occasion of shouting out *Eli, Eli…*, interpreted by some participants as being a calling upon Elijah) (Mt. 27: 47-49;

Mk. 15: 34-36). Elijah is the one *always present* in *The New Covenant*, together with John, next to Christ, a poor mountain shepherd in his sheep coat, in his "miracles-working" coat, under which there boils the heart of a great craver for God and of a fierce heralder of Christ.

May him be to all of us an example of fearlessness, sincerity, love for God, unpretentious speaking, disgust of lie and of idolatry, disgust of hypocrisy and amazed disgust when we encounter on the meandrous way of our life the disgusting imposture.

## THE HOLY ANGER

In this brief and sober words addressed by Jesus to the man with palsy at Bethesda Pond – *Get up, take your ben, and walk* (Jn. 5: 8) – consequently to the confession of the sick man that he was lying for thirty-eight years and there is no man to immerse him in the mirky water, it seems to me as an indubitable act of anger. I am imagining the Lord staring at that disgusting, infected, and defiled bed, at that human, helpless human rag, whom one could say that it nailed on the wicked stretcher (as it followed to Him on the cursed wood of the Cross) and, seemingly disgusted, sad, and undignified by the state which a creature of His can descend to, he doesn't lose any time asking questions as: "Do you believe that I can do this?", or with circumstantial words as: "Be it to you according to your faith". But he talks with a loud voice, in a *military* tonality, to the man staying in front of Him, and, in order to put an end to the man's enslaving buy the object, He gives him the commandment: Stand up and take you bed away.

The bed is places in its objective condition as a *thing*, as a servant, as a simple tool *made* by man who is a free being and a bearer of the divine breath. It is ended thus the scandalous, the revolting situation, one that has been lasting for tens of years, which the man was like some sort of annex in, as some sort of accessory to some inanimate planks and nails. Christ unveils Himself to us as agitated, hurried, upset. Therefore, He also passes over the usual formulas: "Forgiven are your sins" or "Be healed of your suffering"; being in the same time explained the military tonality of the words which -harshly and precisely – bless the ill man from on the bed. Christ knew that that man committed sins and therefore he was worthless of earning some friend, some savior, but that didn't matter: He was insomuch upset with and disgusted by the miserable condition of a human being, namely of a creature whom the Holy Ghost Himself flickers within, so that He no longer listened but to His angry mercy from within Himself, to the torrent of compassion and dread, and, by leaping over any sayings He uttered in previous miracles, He goes by lightning fast to the essence and He shouts out: Stand up and walk! The special specification *taking your bed* has its cause in the fact that it was necessary to finally bring the creature out from the yoke of the object, form the lowering and awful posture which it was suffering in for such a long time. The bed must be "defeated" and what a better proof of that victory could be than the fact that now the bed is carried by the hand of its former prisoner?

So, the tone is military-like, and it is limpid the fact that there is smoldering, in the deep of the words, the anger. Anger in the case of the other

man with palsy, in the case of the man from Capernaum (Mt. 9: 6; Mk. 2: 11; Lk. 5: 24), we do not notice. Rather the mercy and the emotion caused by the faith of the man with palsy and of those who lowered him through the hatch which at the houses from Orient lead to the terrace-roof. But also, at Capernaum the style if focused, the words are few in number, the cadence is sharp: *Get up, take your bed, and go home*. We owe not to lose from our sight the locution *I am telling you*, present in the Mak's and Luke's text, for this direct talking denotes a sharpness of the look and a commanding disposition – related, of course, to those who were thinking: Who is This One Who blasphemes and arrogates the right of forgiving the sins? *I am telling you* means also the establishing of a mysterious relationship of I-you, between the Bestower and the receiver.

The anger is doubtlessly exposed and it results out of the very text of the *Gospel* in the case with the withered hand healed on a Saturday in a synagogue. This scene is recounted by all three synoptic Evangelists (Mt. 12: 9-13; Mk. 3: 1 and the followings; Lk. 6: 6-10 and 14: 1-4) it is of a striking authenticity and of a powerful dramaticism, and it is impossible not to impress even the emptiest hearts. Christ is in the synagogue; everybody keeps their eyes pointed at Him, full of malice, of envy, of fundamentalist fanaticism, and of zealous hypocrisy. Will He dare to transgress the Saturday in this cult place? And the man with the paralyzed hand is there inside. Silent, probably, and shy, and full of a mad hope. There should have been a total silence, the atmosphere should have been charged and heavy. Christ orders to the man in cause: *Get in the middle*, namely in the middle of the hall, in other words of the nave, actually in the middle of the circle full of hostile looks and thoughts. And by making a last attempt, by making a last effort, He asks the ones who were indifferent to the suffering from their immediate closeness, but who were also very attentive at the occasion for blaming the Healer: should one do, on Saturday, good of evil? And they, stiffened, wry, sunken, petrified in their evilness and dumbness, they didn't answer Him anything. They keep their silence like some sort of stones, of cattle, of some people chocked in their own gall and venom. Then, as the text says – and to what pathetic height it reaches -, Christ, *looking at them angrily* (Mk. 3: 5) and being sad because of the callousness of their heart, he tells to the lame: *Stretch forth your hand*. And that hand immediately becomes healthy, like the another.

What a shaking and great scene! I cannot stop myself repeating and noticing a quickness, a fulfillment, a synthesizing strength, as in the tragedies from the classical theater. Of course, the synagogue is full with people (Jesus is "an attraction point", a "scandal"). Everybody is all eyes and ears, they look, as

hypnotized, at the two protagonists: the Prophet, and the crippled who barely dares to breathe. And Christ, majestic, calm, imperative, boiling with wonder and upset, *godlike*, He speaks defiantly and challenging: *Get in the middle* (in order that everything to take place solemnly and openly, luminously and in a proclamatory manner), and immediately after: *Stretch forth your hand*! (He broke their mouth!).

In the texts from Matthew and Luke – unlike the text from Mark – there is no reference to anger, but at Luke 6: 6-10 appears one more importance scenographic indication: Before commanding *stretch fort your hand*, Christ *looks around* as He couldn't believe that the people can really be so stubborn, to stupid, and to dominated by such a cruel formalism. He *looks around* isn't a simple detail, it is the proof of an exact recount it is the expression of a n amazement (which wouldn't have lacked of the hope that, still, at least a voice will express the non-solidarization with the collective wickedness).

*The Gospel according to Saint Luke* mentions another similar case, briefly recounted – of the healing of a man ill with dropsy, also on a Saturday, and also on the ground of the absolute muteness of the Pharisees and of the teachers of the law. But the text from the Chapter no. 13 (verses 10-17) of the same *Gospel* is simpler and it evokes another healing of the hunched woman, tormented for eighteen years by that helplessness. Jesus sees her, he calls her, He untied her of her helplessness – in full synagogue and on a Saturday too[49]. This time, the one getting angry is the chief of the synagogue (he doubtlessly speaks on behalf of all believers), because he cannot conceive somebody to be healed on Saturday. The Lord calls all the present people as hypocrites and He shames them up by reminding to them that all of them untie their ox or they donkey and drive them to the water well.

The Lord's anger is manifested in numerous points of the evangelical narration. When the children are brought to ne touched by Him, and the disciples rebuke them who bring those children, the Lord *get angry* (Mk. 10: 14) and utters: *Let the children come to me* (Mt. 19: 13-14; Lk. 18: 15-16) but without mentioning the anger. Anger, of course, would have felt the Lord – a fiery anger – when he chased away the sellers from the temple (Mt. 21: 12-13; Mk. 11: 15; Lk. 19: 45; 2: 14-16) and He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the chairs of the pigeons' sellers. The whip made out of ropes, the scattering of the money, the toppling over of the tables and of the chairs,

[49] Why especially on Saturday and in synagogue? Isn't that a defiance? The answer cannot be but this: Yeas, in order to confront them, to scandalize them. In order they to know that something totally new and unparalleled is happening, that one must answer to the legist-formalism right then and there; and right when the legist-formalism reckons of being safer. It is *an attack on the operational center of the enemy*.

the tumult, the vociferations, the getting out of the oxen and of the sheep, they compose a painting openly staying under the sight of the most merciless anger. The banishing away from the temple of the merchants represents the turning point of supreme unchaining of the anger smoldering within the Lord. Likewise, regarding the Pharisees: the entire Chapter no. 23 of the first *Gospel* and the verses no. 39-52 from the Chapter no. 11 of *The Gospel according to Saint Luke* – true philippics and catillinarians – they convey the sensation of a terrible, relentless anger, and they sue the most unequivocal terms (*woe to you*, *hypocrites, reckless, blind guides, insane and blind, baby-vipers* etc.). Here the anger overflows like a lava, unhindered, it inundated and it shakes the foundations of the vast scaffolding of the pride and of the cunningness.

The fruitless fig tree (Mt. 21: 19; Mk. 11: 13-14) has its share of Lord's anger and it remains cursed for eternity. We also meet, in other places of the *Gospels* the substantive *anger* and the verb *to anger*, or equivalent expressions hinting at Christ. Thus, for instance, at Matthew 18: 34: "And *getting angry* his master, he gave him in the hands of the tormentors, until he will pay the whole hid debt". Or, also at Matthew, at 22: 7: "And hearing the emperor that, he *got angry*". Angry as language and as feeling are also formulations like: "Better would be if he tied a millstone on his neck" (Lk. 17: 2). "The master of that servant will come on the unsuspected day and he *will cut him asunder*" (Lk. 12: 46); "Who will fall on this stone he *will be shattered*, and on whom it will fall *it will crush* him" (Mt. 21: 44). Also, in the parables with the talents of with the vineyard workers, of the wedding of the son of emperor or of the big dinner, one can feel the anger (expressly mentioned by the Evangelist Luke 14: 21: "Then, the master of house *getting angry*"; and also, in other numerous places of *The Gospel according to Saint Apostle John* (for ex.: 5: 28 and 47; 8: 21-24 and 49), "Baby vipers" exclaims not only Saint Baptist John (Mt. 3: 7), but also the Lord (Mt. 12: 34), the One Who didn't hesitate at all to tell Peter: "*Go behind me, satan*" (Mt. 16: 23; Mk. 8: 33), or to declare: "Any tree which doesn't bring fort fruits *it is hewn down and thrown into fire*" (Mt. 7: 17; Lk. 4: 8), Who strongly rebukes the Chorazin, Betsaida, Capernaum, and Jerusalem; and he announces: "*Don't believe that I have come to bring peace on earth; I haven't come to bring peace but sword*".

Lo the Lord is gentle, He is long-patient, and He is much-merciful. But neither the anger is stranger to Him when necessary. The resignation, the kindness, the lenience, the endurance are, of course, major Christin virtues. In the proximity of the industrious stupidity, of the haughty foolishness, of the evilness, of the hypocrisy, of the shouting-at-skies injustice, of the indifference to another's pain and need, of the wickedness, of the worthlessness, of the

stubborn and cynical formalism, of the thirst for blood, of the unquenched enmity, the Christian owes to follow the example of his Lord and Teacher and to full himself up with a legitimate and holy anger. Let him not stay resigned, weak, indifferent (as the priest and the Levite form the parable of the merciful Samaritan, or as the rich man in front of whose house the poor Lazarus suffered on garbage), locked up in himself, blind, cold, and dehumanized. The Christian is required to be kind and gentle, but with discernment (*vero distinguo falsum* said the Latin poet). And with right-reckoning, as in all other problems he faces in his complicated and meandrous life. There are, undoubtedly situations which the answer cannot be in but the indignant and sad anger.

Out of the said things we can deduce a substantial teaching, namely that there are two sorts of anger sharply differing form one another: the anger as sin – personal, egotistic, stupid, stubborn, most of the time ridiculous, springing out of hatred, of envy of lacking the self-control, of resentment, of thoughtlessness; and there is the legitimate anger – holy, disinterested, caused by the tearing apart spectacle of the unchained evilness, of the triumphant injustice, of the injustice done to the fellow human or to the fellow humans who are rebuked, persecuted, and mocked. This second type of anger isn't at all a product of the inward agitation, of the temperamental impulse, but it is totally rational and triggered from outside[50]. The affirmation belonging to Nicholas Berdyaev regarding the character of "materialness" of the worry for bread helps us here too in order to distinguish between the two sorts of anger. If I keep complaining myself because of not having enough bread, I will prove to be myself more or less a slave of my belly. The bread *to me* is – in a defamatory meaning – a "material" and bodily matter. But if I am preoccupied with and worried by the problem of the bread of my neighbor, and I am worried about not being sufficient, that bread will stop being "a material and bodily matter" and it will become a spiritual duty. *My* bread is a physiological matter, the bread of *another* is to me a spiritual duty and a perfectly legitimate worry. Thus, this is like in the case of the anger as well. Mine – egotistic, savage, regarding only myself, caused only by reasons characteristic to my imperialistic and haughty self as irritability and irascibility and nervosity and susceptibility – it is an ugly sin. Mine, as triggered by the eruptions of the stupidity and

[50] The French language discerns between the inferior anger called as *colère*, and the superior and altruistic anger called as *courroux*. Could that be similar in the Romanian language the substantive *fury* and the adjective *furious* as referring especially to the first aspect of our psycho-neurological reaction, while *anger* and *angry* to refer to the second type? The Lord appears to us sometimes urged by anger, but never furious. The fury, visceral and dumb, it cannot be generous and holy, but the anger can – abundantly so.

evilness around me, by the undeserved suffering of my brother, by the injustice committed to him, by the debauched formalism, by the shameless lie, by the despise for man, by discriminations, by deceit, by slapping over an innocent eye, by persecuting the defenseless, by mocking the weak and other things like those, it will no longer be a sin but a virtue – and even a duty. And it will be good, holy, and just. This sort of fiery anger was within the Lord's soul and it is decent and wise to remind a truth often forgotten, in order not to deform within our mind, our heart, and our thought, the justiciary and clairvoyant character of the Christianity.

Christian isn't by definition a dumb and weak man, an insensitive, one taking care only of his souls and peace, a follower of the subterfuge: *Why should I care*?". The Christian, preponderantly, care for others.

May the Lord make us worthy of the holy anger against all the forms of the evil and may Him bestow us the will and the valiance of confront those with the power of His Holy Name.

## CAN ONE TALKS ABOUT THE INJUSTICE OF GOD?

The phrase belonging to Saint Isaac the Syrian – *do not blaspheme by saying that God is just* – it can appear to us, at a first glance, as strange, revolting, impossible to understand. Isn't the justice revealed all over the content of *The Old Covenant* (and especially in the *Book of Psalms*) as being one of the major attributes of the divinity? Doesn't all theologians and all believers reckon it so, without exception?

And still, we find out in *The New Covenant* solid confirmations of the assertion of Saint Isaac the Syrian, as outrageous as it is. Here the justice does no longer convey the impression that it owns the primordiality admitted in the first part of the *Scripture*; one could say that, in a way amazing to the human ming, the justice is being substituted by its contrary itself.

▪ Does God commit justice by sending to death on the cross and in dreadful torments His innocent and righteous Son, in order to save the crowds of sinners? Knowing very well that the reaction of a mankind deeply sunk in evils it will be the nailing of the godhead on the cursed wood? The embodiment (towards suffering, mockery, and crucifixion) of the Word – for the sake and on the purpose of expiating some people addicted to sins – how could one qualify it else but an act of obvious injustice?

▪ How about the behavior of the father of the profligate son? It is twice unjust: towards the sapient son, who never transgressed his commandments and to whom the father never gave a yeanling to gladden himself together with his friends. The father reckoned as natural the toils and the obedience of his sapient son and he never cared of manifesting his content and his parental affection. The father didn't treat his sapient son but as a hireling and as a tool. And if the behavior of the father towards his sapient son is strikingly cold and indifferent, and phlegmatic, and distant, then, towards another son of his – the debauched and the profligate – the father's behavior is scandalously enthusiastic and forgiving. Not only that the father allows him to turn back home but, seeing his son from far, he runs to his son, he embraces his son, and he kisses his son; then the father commands to be given to his just arrived son his best coat, to be put a ring in his finger, to be put shoes on his feet; finally, the father orders to be stabbed the fattened calf and he gladdens himself together with all his household, eating, dancing, and singing.

Everything but not justice it can be called this biased behavior manifested towards the culpable. One could understand the forgiveness, but the party, the gladness, the noise (because the songs and the dancing were heard from far) – especially when related to the cheapness proven to another

son – cannot but surprise the reader of this parable and stir him up serious bewilderments regarding the way the father understood the justice.

- The parable of the hirelings working the vineyard, it is even more edifying. Not for nothing spoke against, the workers who worked since the first hour when seeing that they receive the same payment as the workers who started working on the eleventh hour. The work should be retributed according to its quantity and quality. Even if the workers staring to work on the eleventh hour had been more skillful and more industrious, there would have still remained the shouting-at-sky discrepancy, the report being one to eleven. And it is not the same working an hour in the breeze of the evening with the toiling for twelve hours through the heat of the day.

The parable of the workers to the vineyard hired on different moments of the day and receiving the same payment confesses bout a non-equalitarian conception upon payment, namely an injustice. The argument that the sum established in the beginning remained the same, it is a purely formal one.

- What about the parable of the fruitless fig tree? Here the injustice is even clearer and it necessarily stirs up the bewilderment. We are very clearly told that "it wasn't the time for figs" (Mk. 11: 13). Whye then to curse a poor innocent tree which is submitted to the periods of the fructification? The fig tree is so harshly and irremediably punished for a situation not depending on its will, and it is a known fact that the accountability implies the freedom of will.

- Also, in the behavior of the Lord towards Martha we notice a serious dose of injustice.

Martha "strives with much serving" (Lk. 10: 40), while Mary, in the same time, she sits at the Lord's feet listening to Him. Martha, overwhelmed with chores, she asks Him to send Mary to help her. But the lord not even doesn't do that, but He also rebuked Martha and praise Mary. And that one "who was preparing a great feast" (as some translations say) will remain alone and rebuked, very probably going back to her oven and to her dishes, with a very disappointed heart.

- What about the fornicator woman? She is caught in the fact, her guilt is doubtless, and the legal text referring to her sin reads very limpidly: she must be stoned to death.

But what does Christ? How does he utter the condemnation? In a totally unexpected mode: her accusers are submitted to judgment, and not the guilty woman. She escapes the condemnation, and her accuser leave rebuked by their conscience and ashamed.

▪ And one more ascertainment: Christ proves a steadfast preference and lenience for the publicans, for the debauched women, for the sinners (as it is also the case with the today's *Gospel*: not the prayer of the righteous Pharisee, who is not a thief or one committing adultery, and who fasts twice a week, and who gives tithe out of mint and of dill and of cumin, and of anything he earns, not his prayer is received, but the prayer of the sinful publican is received).

Whose houses Jesus goes for eating and drinking? The justice wanted Him to shun from sinners, not to enter their houses, not to dine together with them. But He, no! He seems to intentionally defy the righteousness and the sapience by spending His time only among sinners and debauched women; in their houses He likes to tarry with His disciples, not hesitating to sit at their tables where the sinners come in big numbers. (Mt. 9: 10: "And while He was sitting at the table, in the house, lo that many publicans and sinners came and sat at the table together with Jesus and with His disciples").

▪ Even stranger and enigmatic, I think, appear to be the texts from Matthew 13: 12 and 25: 29; Mark 4: 25; Luke 8: 18 and 19: 26 which, essentially, they say the same thing: "Him who has it will be given and He will have plenty, and from him who doesn't have (or he think he doesn't have) even the few that has it will be take away from him". Lo an enunciation that cannot but trouble the conscience of the rational man, as it happened to them who heard Him saying those parables.

▪ Finally, was it right Him to exonerate His killers and Him to ask us to love our enemies?

▪ For them who crucify Him, Christ prays (Lk. 23: 34), and he asks us to love our enemies (Mt. 5: 44; Lk. 6: 27) while he wants us (Lk. 14: 26; Mt. 10: 37) to hate our father, our mother, our wife, our children, our sisters, our soul, our house, our field, and our wealth! And He wants us even not to care too much of the graves of our parents. More unnatural and more unjust asks cannot be imagined by the mind of the vain-man!

It is necessary, now, to explain what seems to be stranger, revolting, and impossible to understand.

In order to clarify the examples previously presented by us, we must understand an essential thing: the Christianity represents a passing from justice to love. Between *The Old* and *The New Testament,* the difference form this point of view is total: the entire *Old Covenant* is unveiled to us as focused on the idea of justice, while the *New Covenant* is focused on the idea of love and humbleness. It passes from a tonality to another, from a realm to another. In *The New Testament* there lives a totally different world. The Lw, the justice,

the commandments (the *tariag*, the 613 positive and negative commandments of the synagogue) are moved aside and replaced for the all-victorious breath of the love. In the name and in the virtue of the love, the Heavenly Fathers sends His Son on earth in order to suffer and to save beings whoa re so little worthy of salvation. Alike proceeds the father in the parable of the profligate son: he exceedingly rejoices for the coming back of the sinner, for he has mercy on him, and his love overwhelms the less intense feeling of and the less valuable justice. The master of the vineyard pays to those who came on the eleventh hour the same among of money as he pays to those who acme on the first hour, for he is generous, he is noble, and he isn't animated by a petty spirit of an accountant. He doesn't have time and he isn't in a mood for calculation, and he doesn't understand the upset of them whom he committed injustice to ("Or you eye which is evil, because I am kind?" – Mt. 20: 15). The fig tree is cursed because in reality it represents and it symbolizes the man who searches for excuses and alibies in terms and schedules in order not to serve God, in order not to answer on any moment (with "Yes, Lord", "Here I am, Lord") His calling. Martha is rebuked because if it unparallelly more valuable to listen to the word of Christ than to do shores and to set the table (even with the most laudable intentions). The woman who committed adultery escapes her punishment in order to be given the possibility of repenting, and her accusers are granted a salutary lesson of humbleness and of lenience. Christ goes to publicans, to sinners, to defiled, because not the righteous need correction, but the sinners, as a doctor is useful to the sick people and not to the healthy ones.

What does it mean "has" in the texts – apparently scandalous – where it is said that to him who has it will be given? It means that "he has faith", he is faithful who constantly increases his faith, and whom, by persevering in his faith, the grace keeps multiplying his faith (wherefrom, to us too, the lesson: let's strengthen our faith, lets bring forth the fruits of our faith). Why should we forgive our enemies and love them? Why should we hate our closest relatives and our most legitimate goods? For the love for Christ and for the love for our neighbor to be abundant, regardless who he would be, for only thus we can differ from pagans and we can integrally receive the teaching of our Lord.

The new norm is the love, it no longer is strict, rigorous, dry, fenced justice, and even lesser supra-meticulous, the blind fulfillment of the 613 commandments. Lo what the Pharisees didn't understand. The paradoxical character staying at the basis of the new teaching, they couldn't ascertain or assimilate. Leon Bloy though – who loved Jesus and who existentially could intuit the meaning of His parables – he was able to write: "Oh! Christ Who loves

them who crucify You and crucify them who love You". It really is so: He forgives His killers and blasphemers, while He destines His apostles, His disciples, His believers, to crucifixion and to being torn apart by wild beasts, and to be burnt at stake, to be cut with the swords, to persecutions, to all sorts of torments, sufferings, and toils. He prays for the first ones to His Father, while He advised the other ones to take up their cross and to follow Him on the road of the Calvary.

The Christianity, in comparison to the Old Law, as *way of living*, it is something totally new, it is totally *something else*; crossing from a domain to another, from an axiology to another, it produces an effect t called by physicists as *zoom effect*: the situation is toppled over, the perspective is unveiled from totally different point of ordering the visual field, and form totally different standpoints. The Christianity in comparison to the Old Law is like the quantum physics to the Newtonian physics: the love is so different from the simple justice, the love surpasses the simple justice so much, opening to our amazed eyes another horizon, another world with other paradoxical laws, as a non-theologian as Lucian Blaga understood it very well. Lo why neither the paradox of Saint Isaac the Syrian must offend or scare us.

On the opposite, it must make us happy and appeased. Let's be glad for God isn't righteous. If we were judged according to justice, we would be lost.

This is for the Psalmist says (no one else but this zealous apologist of the justice): "If you look at lawlessness, Lord, Lord, who will be able to endure it?[51] (Ps. 129: 3[52]) and "Do not enter the judgment with Your servant, because nothing among the living is righteous in front of You" (Ps. 142: 2[53]).

If He enters with us to a right judgment, all of us will be condemned. Fortunately for us, God doesn't judge only according to the justice but also according to mercy, to love, and to lenience. God, as a folk saying says (one that speaks more deeply and more theologically than we are prepared to admit it): *God cheats at scale* in order to help us, for: "what is impossible to people it is possible to God" (say all three *synoptical Gospels*, Mt. 19: 26; Mk. 10: 27; Lk. 18: 27). The Lord can always call his faithful servant, Archangel Michael, and command him to throw his sword on that side of the scale meaning the defeat of the darkness's powers. The Lord's love for people, the power of His cherished blood spilled on the cross, His mercy (which the people don't know how to call it but justice), all of those can work miracles.

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[51] Or: who will be able to stand in front of You?
[52] In KJB we have: Ps. 130: 3. (E. l. t.'s n.)
[53] In KJB we have: Ps. 143: 2. (E. l. t.'s n.)

So that, the saying of Saint Issac the Syrian, far from confusing us or far from being a cause of offense and of scandal to us, it only is a spring of happy hope for salvation.

# VII.
# HAEC SCRIBIMUS VOBI UT GAUDEATIS
# - DAI LI -

## ORTHODOX CREED

I believe in the Holy Trinity.

I believe in One Lord Jesus Christ Who unchanged, due to His mercy and love for us, He embodied Himself in order to comfort us, in order to help us, and in order to give us the sense of the dignity and of the noblesse. Who for us the people valiantly climbed the cross for he wasn't only kind, gentle, and humble in heart, but He was courageous above everything. Who went to the death not only like a lamb driven to slaughter, but also like a lion determined to face the torment. Who didn't want to suffer majestically and solemnly, but to be mocked and rebuked and to endure to the very end the most awful and humiliating agony that exists. In order for, thus, he to assume the most characteristic among the elements of the human condition: the suffering.

Who loves the righteous and Who has mercy on sinners, but Who bears a steadfast and undenied affection to the fearless, be them burdened with past burdens. Who doesn't forget that He too was a man on earth, where He has received His stigmata and where He has achieved a special disgust for whistleblowers, for stubborn clerks, and for bureaucracy.

I believe into Holy Ghost Who blows wherever He wants and whenever He wants, towards the scandal and the confusion of the Pharisees, of the hieratics, and of the bigoted, and Who, as the Father and the Son too, He wants something else than only forms, philosophy, historical and scriptural evidence. Who is disgusted by goats and calves under any shape of form, and He is able to identify those even in the most modern and unexpected forms of theirs. Who doesn't speak in examples, in a seraphic manner and preciously, Who guides us modestly and surely, according to the right-reckoning, and Who doesn't appreciate the unctuous style, the hands piously held together, and the ostentatious morals.

Our faith, as I am convinced, it isn't confounded to the "high spirituality", it doesn't aim at an occult knowledge, at a mental hygiene, or at constituting an insurance instalment for the Final Judgment, and it is stranger to some naïve intransigence, as for instance: no matter what, I won't lie (while the improved monk from *Paterikon* lies for saving, if needed, the life of a man). And it doesn't match a purely organizational conception upon the Church – a juridical and cols organization and, after all, an inquisitorial one: frown foreheads and stiff necks; as also neither it matches the stupidly seraphic grin nor the disorder and the restlessness. It doesn't let itself be convinced by all forces, pains, injustices, and cruelties of the world; it believes in God

adversatively: against, despite, regardless those, though they, woe, there are abundantly.

I confess a baptism towards the forgiving of my sins and towards liberating me from under the yoke of the prejudices, of the smallness, and of the pettiness, towards adopting some Christian reactions within the torrent of the daily life, of its deeds and events.

I don't expect God to solve our worldly businesses, whose wise management falls to us as beings endowed by God with rational mind and with a fiery heart. I don't grant these worldly businesses more importance than needed, but neither do I despise them because they belong to the divine creation. And I take the life seriously while I still defame its vanities, for in it and through it, it is gambled our eternal fate.

I believe in the Church and in the Holy Mysteries, I expect the Church not to mingle there where it shouldn't and I expect the Church to preserve with holiness the spiritual things towards our strengthening. In the same time, contradictorily and paradoxically, I neither want the Church to be blind and indifferent to the problems of its believers and to the complications of the existence.

I grant a little importance to philosophy, to historical arguments, to the moralism, to the aestheticism, and to the erudition, because all of these aren't of one being with the free, unmotivated, Pascaline right-faith. I don't illusion myself, I have read the existentialists, but I neither see everything in black, I know that the world is non-unitarian and surprising, and that everything – in good as well in bad – can happen within it.

I fierily prey for being I conquered by Lord Christ and liberated form the snares of the appearances and from fear, so that I to behave nicely to my fellow humans, I to be worthy of a stance appropriate to one who can always be called as a friend of the lord, and for not only my deeds to be clean but also my thoughts to be clean and honorable.

I believe in miracles (as the hero of Mircea Eliade in *A 14 Years Old Photography*) and I believe that Jesus Christ, with a hunter instinct, He will have mercy on me, though I am letting myself so hardly to be defeated by His endless love.

I am waiting, scared to death but also full of hope, for the Final Judgment, I know that I know nothing, I have not proof, nor argument, and no justification, and the only thing I know is that the Lord is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. If I had been on Golgotha during the crucifixion, I am sure that I wouldn't have asked the Lord to descend from the cross in order I to believe

that He is an Emperor. But, together with Dostoyevsky, I believe that even the truth had been something else than Christ, I would have still remained, no matter what, with Christ.

I am thanking the heavenly powers for they have found me worthy of believing, that it has been done to me this unparalleled honor, and I am uttering with the whole my soul, shouting out with tears – as at Mark 9: 24 -: "I believe Lord! Help my faithlessness".

## MONASTIC MEDITATIONS

1. I would tell to my brothers into monasticism: do not be bigot, do not be formalists.

Or be like that, if your nature is so; but with measure, control yourselves, restrain yourselves from that zeal that boasts and risks to get closer to Pharisaism. Strive yourselves to understand that Chist didn't come into the world in order to found a new religion, one more religion, but in order Him to unveil to us a new way of life. Thus, I conceive the Christianity as a totally new way of living, one totally original, one of obvious supra-earthly origin. The Christianity must be taught in schools by the future theologians and theologized by priests; the others (or even the specialists mentioned before) must especially to life it, to put it in practice. Christianity is among the substances which when *in vitro* they get withered, and which thrive and proliferate only *in vivo*.

I would also tell them: the most difficult part in monastery isn't the fasting, the prostrations, or the vigils. All of these are a piece of cake. *Really difficult is, like in any other closed community, to life in peace and in harmony with the other inhabitants, to tolerate their particular way of being, of behaving, and of living; to tolerate their unavoidable tics, manias, instinctual reactions, and to desensitize yourself regarding your own nervous reactions to the environment*. The interhuman relationships, lo the stumbling stone! The brotherly love, or at least the benevolence, the patience, the lenience, and the will (we are again coming across it) for preserving the friendship among brothers; these ones prove the authenticity of a Christian living, of a monastic vocation… Only these homologate the use of the name "monastery". If not, everything is but parade and panorama. And the mentioned features are but the obedience to the Lord's words: "I am giving you a new commandment: Love on one another. Into this they will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13: 34-35). Nothing, no feature regardless how superior, no ascesis, no theological science, no martyrdom can replace this *absolute* commandment.

And I would add here: if you are unable to, if the love isn't accessible to you, at least control your nerves and anger, at least *behave like you would love – as you would, als ob* as the German philosophers say; this too is an acceptable way, of course one of inferior order, but presenting the chances to be the preparation for the superior form and to become, in time, love, this

being a case of the process deemed by Constantin Noice as: becoming into being.

2. In sermons (especially), in the theological articles (also) let's not commit the grave error of confounding the stylistic platitude to the Orthodoxy. The demon of the slogans and of the ecclesiastical stereotypy is equally real and virulent like its twin brother form literature; it stalks all the hierarch ds, all the priests, and all the monks, walking around restless and searching for whom to swallow, to compromise, and to sterilize. The best and nicest feelings or the most useful teachings are annihilated by the verbal stereotypy, that is a symptom of laziness, of fear, and of hearts dryness. Equally enmity present the teaching-like style – edifier -, unctuous, emphatic, grandiloquent, or the comfortable habit to reduce the sermon to repeating the *evangelical pericope*. The *Homiliary* is nice, sweet, and inviting, but it still cannot replace the living word. Do no fear of finding original metaphors, of using them in a picturesque speech, plainly, to everybody's understanding, of replacing the grey of so many grumpy sermons for the vivacity of the strong colors. A little fauvism, I am daring to affirm, by making a lightening incursion into the domain of the plastic arts.

3. Tightly related to the disaster of the platitude and of the standardized speech, there is the plague of the legging behind, of tarrying in long gone worlds, namely the sermons which forget about the fact that they are addressed to contemporary people, and not to some believers who lived decades, centuries, if not even millennia ago. The examples, the exhortations, the advices, the rebukes, they must constantly be actualized. This is the true *aggiornamento*! The dogma is the steadfast one, and not the imagistic, not the capturing, ads also in the prophane life the morals do not change but the poetical sensitiveness constantly takes diverse shapes and it dialogues with different areas of the self. One must not overlook that each historical epoque has its predominant sins; one must combat these sins, and not speaking about former outdated sins which have been attenuated by the curse of the history. Actualizing the examples and the themes can help by itself the teaching word to avoid the falling into monotony and boredom and against becoming a damnation to the listeners. He who speaks in the penultimate decade of the XX Century, he cannot refer to the same sins, addictions, and situations as Saint John Crysostom, Beniamin Costache, or Antim Ivireanul. There are, now, other illnesses, other evils, other dangers, and other temptations! Let's aim at these ones if we want to be us truly listened to (and not out of obligation and politeness and with hands discretely covering the yawning), and followed

attentively also after leaving the church, reckoned as useful teachers and not as robots and mechanical oranges. It is useless, for instance, to hit harshly and insistently the thirst for wealth or the non-payment at the due time of the servants, or other social and economic details which are long gone. The monks and the parishioner priests owe equally to know the needs, the hardships, and the troubles of our days, and to talk to their listeners as a contemporary of theirs and not as a mummy, as a fantom, as a gramophone. The monks are not required to be up to date with the movies, with the comedies, with the games broadcast by radio or tv, but they owe to be perfectly informed about the pains and the sufferings of the people "from the world".

Let the monk's way of speaking not to be distant, proud, "official", namely exhausted and baren. The Lord didn't speak like that, but He was always friendly, close, with clear images and almost all of those extracted from the daily life of the shepherd, of the plowman, of the fisher, of the vineyard worker, and of the common people.

4. The narrow and locked into itself bigotry, it is as well Pharisaic inheritance, and therefore a calamity. One cannot know the true monk according to the disordered length of the beard or according to the uncleanness of the clothes, of the monastic cell, or of the toilets. Do I have as ideal the groomed and neat monk? Not at all! This is the replica of a sophistic argumentation used by an advocate, because anyone can understand that taking care of oneself isn't the same with the haughtiness.

The dirtiness can be an ascesis, as many others, but only when strictly personal, because it has no communitarian value. In order the dirtiness to be worthy of the qualificative of ascesis, of sacrifice, it must, in the first place, not to spring out of laziness and of carelessness, but to be due to some principial considerations and convictions, in other words it must imply a renunciation: the sacrifice of the natural desire of the man to live in cleanness.

Secondly, it is absolutely necessary one to take heed at:

a) the Lord's saying that in the house of His Father there are many dwelling places (Jn. 14: 2);

b) the principle of the freedom which is itself the foundation of the Christendom. No one comes forcedly to Christ, no one can impose his point of view to another. The monk who desires practicing the ascesis of not washing himself, he can do that within his monastic cell. But he cannot stubbornly spread that around him, namely he cannot make of that a rule for others who do not reckon that the path of the dirtiness unmistakingly lead to deliverance. In the places of freedom, namely in the common halls, in the mess hall, in

kitchen, in the toilets, the rule will be the rigorous observation of the cleanness. One could never invoke there the authority of the dirtiness. Each one is free to o the mortification he reckons as adequate to himself, for in the house of the Father there are many dwelling places and no mortal had the right to attribute to a certain (relative) modality of suffering a character of generality and of preeminence.

Regarding the washing up of the body, it is appropriate us to remember the things said by Saint Apostle Paul in his *Epistle towards Romans*, at the chapter no. 14. The non-washing isn't at all a proof of spiritual improvement, because the apostle of the gentiles (14: 14) shows that nothing is defile in itself but only to him who thinks something defiled. To him who doesn't reckon that washing himself up or taking a bath is a defilement, the washing up is not a sin, and the dirt and the grime aren't acts guaranteeing the salvation.

Also in the chapter no. 14, Paul writes that (v. 3 and 6): "Let him who eats not to despise him who doesn't eat, and let him who doesn't east not to despite the one who eats, for God received him" and "he who keeps the day, he keeps it for the Lord; and he who doesn't keep the day, he also does that for the Lord. And he who eats, he eats for the Lord, for he tanks to God; and he who doesn't eat, for the Lord he does that and he thanks to God".

Consequently, the situation is the same regarding the washing up as it is with the eating and with the Sabbath: he who doesn't eat or observes the sabbath, let him not condemn the one who eats and doesn't keep the day. And let him wash himself if he doesn't reckon the washing as a sin, and let him give thanks to God and let him not care about the sour and upset faces of the enemies of the water and of the soap. I met monks who don't wash themselves up, but they use perfume to cover the stench of their bodies. This reminds me of a saying from *Paterikon*: rather than bragging yourself with your fasting, it will be more useful to you to eat meat three times in a day. Likewise: rather than using the perfume you should take a bath three times a day.

I want to underscore here – in the same string of ideas – that the Lord washed the feet of His disciples, and He even told them: He who has taken a bath he doesn't need but his feet to be washed, for he is wholly clean (Jn. 13: 10), from where turns out the idea that Christ doesn't forbid the washing up, neither the bathing. And on Simon the leper He rebukes for he didn't give Him water for washing up His feet (Lk. 7: 44). He blames the Jews of making a ritual; out of washing their hands before eating, and act of value and of soteriological meaning, a sacred ceremony' but He doesn't reject the elementary hygiene. Regarding the interdictions form the Centuries II-IV, they aimed at the

Greek-Roman thermal baths and at their promiscuity, and not at the washing up itself.

5. The fundamentalist fanaticism of any sort it is equally odious and stupid to me, and the fact that it was adopted and practiced by some Christian monks (very few in number, as far as I am aware of it) it doesn't make it at all sympathetic to me. I fell, on the opposite, that the zealot monk of the fundamentalist fanaticism isn't but a *travestied* Christian and Orthodox, one stranger to the faith which, apparently, he professes and he confesses it, a faith that have always been known for its steadfastness but also for its disgust for anything that doesn't belong to the Christian gentleness and from the ancestral right-reckoning. Allow me to refer to the famous Dreyfus case from France, from the end of the past century. Do you doubt the honor of some French officers? Was asked the one who, convinced that the procedural rules of any penal process hadn't been observed, he questioned the validity of the condemnation of captain Dreyfus. I for one, I would have answered like this: not at all, but I doubt something else: the quality as French officers of some people who do not observe the provisions of the procedural law and they decide upon an especially grave punishment on the basis of a secret dossier. I liken them to the witnesses of a duel where it wasn't thoroughly observed the ceremonial, if it happens that one of the combatants dies, so that I reckon they deserve to be sued for murder.

The fundamentalist fanaticism – which equally proves the evilness, the ridicule, and the stupidity – it always leads to heresies, to schisms, to sectarianism, to the supremacy of the letter, for naïve or terrorist religious forms, toa stubborn formalist (stylists), and to compromising the religious phenomenon in the eyes of the sane people. I have always preferred Zosimus to Terapont.

The morosely monk, regardless how long and savage his beard would be, and regardless hos dirty his coat, he too is a monk only in the eyes of the world.

6. On the face of the monk it is good if one can read, on the contrary, the gentleness, the joy, the humbleness, and the noblesse.

And regarding his behavior and attitude towards the things happening around him (in his immediate closeness or farer) he owes not to forget about the fact that being a Christian doesn't mean proving only gentleness, but also firmness and courage. The courage if an essential Christian virtue. There occur, even in the most recluse and detached form the worldly things life, moments when it becomes mandatory to pronounce yourself: to show your true

colors. Then (and we find plenty of examples during the polytheistic or iconoclastic persecutions), dominant qualities end to be these ones: the courage, the dignity, the non-hesitation; let's have our role-model in such circumstances the gentle Jesus walking, fearless and determined, towards Golgotha. The body, yes, it collapses under the burden of the cross; but the moral (human) force doesn't allow to be defeated.

Thus, *the art of being monk* mustn't be at all confounded to the (by no means easy) intertwining of the sweetness with the harshness, of the gentleness with the strength, of the obedience with the steadfastness.

7. I am not hiding also the fact that I have my own (totally personal) opinion on the crazy for Christ people, on the Russians (at whom were proliferating) the so called *iurodavai*.

I look at them with big and grave reserve.

Firstly, because their behavior is pure hypocrisy and total untruth. They aren't either crazy or stupid. They pretend to be. This is a lie and a hoax. The truth it that, unlike the Pharisees (and their descendants) who claimed (still claiming) to be better than they were (are), the crazy for Christ people are complacent in not to boast themselves, but to show themselves more evil, stupider, and worthier of disgust than they really are. But in both cases, the situation is one and the same: the untruth. Both of them play theater. In different ways, but still untrue.

Then: is it the lie (be it a cause of mortification for an actor) a dignified means for extolling Christ? Must we honor Him so, by pretending, by deceiving the people around us, by exposing our preference for the part of a buffoon? Coud this be a sacrifice with a good fragrance and pleasant to God Who is not a God of the disorder?

Thirdly (and here we come across the essence, the nucleus, the sensitive and grave point): the one claiming to be crazy for Christ pretends himself to be stupid, insane, confuse, unbearable, in order to annoy his brothers so that they will insult him, mock him, persecute him, and rebuke him. In other words, *he incites them to commit sins* in order to guarantee his martyrdom and salvation. What sort of deliverance is this having at its basis the incitation of your fellow human to commit sin? Is this the way you want to save yourself by trampling on the soul and on the eternal fate of the others?

The iurodavai *expects* (desires, he counts on) to be violented, offended, despised, and treated like a wicked. Otherwise, the whole his play will purposeless, it won't bring him any gain.

I strongly fear that Christ doesn't want to see us fighting in this way for our consummation[54]!

Any individual, as Dostoyevsky teaches us, has the right to be happy. But not on the expense and towards the damage and towards the loss of another. Let him achieve his happiness on his own, if he can, but not by exploiting his brother; namely not by theft, by adultery, by deceit, by being an informant. All the more not by provoking his fellow human, by not tempting him to fall into the sin of the anger, of the insult, of the contempt.

There is – worldly speaking – the danger that the "crazy", but keeping playing theater to reach truly losing his minds – totally or partially -, of that his pretended insanity to become a habit to him. So happened to many of the young Russian populists sent to villages for propaganda, through pubs: themselves became alcoholics.

(On the insane ones for Christ, on the intransigents of the washing up, on those keeping the Saturday, on stylists, I see them as some naïve persons, some reductionists, some simple ones. Out of the descent of the Son od God on earth, out of all the teaching of Christ, out of Decalogue, our of Blessings, out of the Sermon from the Mountain, out of parables, our of the Sacrifice on the cross, they have memorized and they have understood only this: the circus, the grime, the filth, the "holy calendar", the supremacy of the ordinal counting (the seventh day – the Saturday) to the loss of the semantical counting (the Sabbath – a resting day).

8. The monasticism is like joining the army, and therefore it is stance, it is dignity. Let's not forget that we are the servants, the "friends" of a great Lord, of a Knight who left us as inheritance the discretion (when we fast, when we pray, when we give alms), the forgiveness, the power of forgetting the evil done to us, the noble power of praying for those who hate us, the generosity, the disgust for accounting and for money and dimes, a Lord Who rebuked Judah and all the apostle when they got sad for being wasted such a value of 300 dinars of chrism and He taught them to discern the sacrifice from waste, and Who addressed Himself even to Judah with the appellative "friend", and Who didn't tremble and didn't mumbled excuses before the synedrium of the ruler, and Who always bestowed and rewarded like a king, fully and above brim, grace upon grace, hundredfold, thousandfold, and He multiplied the breads, the fish, and the wine, and He blessed and loved the abundance. Thew monk cannot, by definition, to be cheap, petty, worries, alarmed. Calmness and detachment are two great monastic virtues, whom it is added – paradoxically-

[54] Fer. Theresa of Avilla: The insanity of the Gospel is a calm insanity.

the love for life (namely for God) and the fearlessness of death (namely of the separation of the soul from the body). To those from this group it is not allowed to complain, to groan, to regret the lost material goods, they owe to always have at hand the phrase of Eugen Ionesco (now reconciled with God): "Let's always be able to lose everything in a moment". The monk, of course, he too is a boyar in his way, elevated to this rank by the love and by the grace of Christ. And the monk could benefit of uttering the words of Al. O. Teodoreanu, the former cleric Damian Stanoiu (who was upset because of being his books placed more laterally than the books of Pastorel): "The art, you must know it, Father, it is lordship. So is the monasticism too: lordship!

9. In the controversy of the free will or of the slavery, regarding the argument of the potter used by Saint Apostle Paul in his *Epistle towards Romans* (9: 18 and the followings) and then reiterated by Augustinians and Protestants: "Will the creature tell to Him Who created it: Why have you made me like this?... Or doesn't have the potter power upon his clay so that out of the same kneading to make an honorable vessel and another less honorable?" – one can answer it: Can our God Who sent His Son into the world to be crucified for our salvation be reckoned as a careless potter or a fabricant of inanimate tools, or is He the God of the love and the Maker of some creatures whom He gave breath of life right out of His breath.

And on Elihu, the son of Baruchel of Buz, from the family of Ram, who authoritatively puts an end to the discussion between Job and his friends, by proclaiming (Job 32 and the followings) the arbitrary almightiness of God and proving that God is not accountable to anybody for all the things He does, couldn't we liken his attitude to that expressed by the phrase: When you are talking to me, shut up!".

The monk, I believe, it has two big longings: for the Midnight Office, and an acute sensation (one totally non-Augustinian, non-Protestant) of the capacity for freely choosing between good and evil. The Orthodox solution of the salvation (grace + faith + good deeds) it is shown to the monk as he lives for a longer time in the monastery, as being conform to the justice, to the truth, and to the right-reckoning.

The most beautiful moment of the monastic life – and the truer moment of it – I feel it like being that of the Midnight Office. The sweetness of the Holy Liturgy can be tasted by us in any church, from monastery or from any parish. But the Midnight Office is the joy, the mystery, and the center of the monastic schedule. It is our apanage, it is our hour of Loneliness and of Solemnity, that

one when we suspect ourselves as being into non-worldly, but still truly as sentinels taking vigil for the world.

10. One more definition of the monk: the man who is never satisfied with himself.

Another definition of the monk: the monk is a man especially knower and realistic.

Because of the ancestral sin, the monk knows that in every individual there is not only a piece of divine soul, but there is also a demonic impulse. This knowledge provides the monk with a mental superiority over many naïve and ignorant artists, savants, and thinkers who float in that what we could call as immediate reality.

11. Communicativeness:

At the Catholics the altar is open. At us, it is closed. Our mystical sensitivity got used to the separating iconostas situated between the nave and the altar, and we think that it is better so.

But once the Holy Liturgy have been committed in secret, the separator wall between clerics and laymen has no longer a meaning. Between them the relationships try to be now based on communicativeness, that what doesn't happen in many cases. At Rohia Monastery, fortunately, it is practiced a warm and continuous communicativeness between the priestly personnel and the laymen: not only at confession, but also at receiving the lists with persons to be mentioned in prayers, in dialogues, in long spiritual conversations... It is a form of missionary activity that is tied to the (blessed) idea of the participation of the altar's servants to the daily life of the believers. Both of these groups belong to the mystical Body of Christ.

Allow me to repeat an older remark regarding Mircea Eliade, who, because of his unparalleled industriousness and of the work program we mercilessly imposed to himself, even by reducing his sleep to at most tree or four hours a night, like a monk would do it, I called him the "lay monk". I enunciated back then that the true and totally characteristic feature of the monks isn't his faith – as by and large all people think – because the faith is had also by many laymen, but it is a mix of (iron) will, of borderless patience, of (tireless) endurance of the daily chores of the life in a monastery (one monotonous and exhausting. My monasticism years have fully confirmed my opinion. The monk is this: a man with a steeled will, with an undefeatable patience, with an unshakeable determination. The truest comparison made to a monk is not that to an angel into body, but to a sportsman in a training session or to a soldier in his training period. His basis aptitudes, therefore, are:

his health, his power of endurance, his renunciation to susceptibilities, his capacity of fortifying his character. I have written that the monk is the (moral) equivalent of 300 million degrees. I haven't lied. But better and more plastically and more easily to understand, it is to say that: the monk is a hot steel rod, recently got out of oven, a flame of fire (actually) suddenly sunk in the freezing water. The faith – as also the fasting, the prostrations etc. etc. – it is a supposed thing, a happy and easy one. But the concrete monastic life, it is a daily struggle, training, fortification, and bridling. *Bulldog training*: education for a mops dog which, oh wonder, it will have to prove himself at the end of its training gentle like a dove.

The monasticism is – *per excellentiam* – a military life, and the monk, above anything, he must be "a good soldier of Christ". The monk must have the same care for "tenure", the same sense of responsibility, the same need for courage, for perseverance, and for obedience. He must have the same "cutting off of his will", the same impact of the communitarian life. The *self* is both defeated and exalted, maintained in a serving and heroic position. The exalted but disciplined serving, lo the slogan of both camps.

In the religious books the word "enemy" is mentioned for several times; towards this enemy must be focused the attention and the watchfulness of the monks, and to this enemy the monks wage the unsee war that is the essence itself of the state they have adopted and it is the purpose itself of their entire activity.

Exactly as the military life, the monasticism has its greatness but also those servitudes which Alfred the Vigny wrote about (*servitudes et grandeurs militaires*). Overcoming the daily chores is probably the most difficult part of the situations in both cases, needing the heroism both on the battlefield and in the holiness of the life. These ones, the heroism and the holiness happen to belong to itself the nature of the individual, and therefore they are not "hard". But the daily struggle with the typicon and with the self-control in the (Satre-like) relationships with "the Others" represent, as I think, the "heroic" (and meritorious) part of the two professions.

It isn't at all probable that the prestige the military uniform or the monastic vestments have been enjoying along centuries – and they still enjoy it – to be due to some superstitions. Of course, this prestige comes out of deeper layers of the psychic, it manifests its bewilderment for people who succeed in defeated on themselves, to impose to themselves a rigorous way of living independently from the impulses and from the caprices of the individual temperament. Once the oath uttered, the military and the monk will no longer

totally belong to themselves; they have been “committed”; the object of their service is no longe their self, but it is an entity exceeding the limits of the individuality.

The military and the monk had to fight the “enemy”, but in the first place and especially they have to defeat their inward enemy, their “self” that conceived the freedom only as a full horsing around and it feels horror for any fencing up.

After all, the military and the monk are required to be “always ready”: to fight, to resist, to defy the defeats, to find adequate solutions to diverse modes of being attacked. This obligatoriness gives them an acuity of their nature that exceeds that of the laymen (civilian). This military-monastic life is, therefore, more heroic, more exposed to dangers. The Nietzschean formula translate in the Italian language – *vivere periculosamente* – summarizes the two parallel ways of living.

It maybe is more just to detach the risk, the fight, the valiantness, in any human life wanting to transcend, even for a little, the strictly bodily life, and us to strive finding a noblesse to such a life. We see with our bodily eyes around us a grey mass of people; and with the thinking eyes of the heart, we notice countless unknows heroes and saints. Modest, anonymous, they do not wear special clothes. Let’s salute full of humbleness, in thought and in feeling, on those brothers of ours who are known only to God.

## MAGURA SCULPTURE CAMP AND CIOLACU MONASTERY

About the so original – and so charmingly beautiful – famous sculpture camp from Magura it has been written, naturally, a lot (See especially the illustrated volume printed in the year 1980 by the County Committee for Culture and Education of Buzau).

It would be useless if I repeated what other more clever people said about that.

I think that everything that I am allowed to do is exposing as briefly as possible and with an acute sentiment of the vulnerability of my writing, what it represents to my mind and to my soul this ensemble balanced between greatness, grace, and amazement and, at a first glance, with a strictly aesthetical value. I don't deny, of course, its capacity of triggering intense emotions having their origin in the beauty of the surroundings and of the art works. But it seems to me that the shaking of the looker's sight, the winging of his imagination, the crushing of the feelings come out of more secret and deeper regions of the sensitiveness.

We come across, at Magura, to that megalithic world which poet Ion Gheorghe knew how to evoke it so strikingly, as resurrected and gifted with captivating energy in the sculptures of Henry Moore. And the stones from Magura aren't simple rocks or only skillful works of art, but they are spiritualized stones, they are badges owning a radiant ghost. How comes that, I would be, logically, asked. Can the stoned become receptacles of Holy Ghost? And I will answer that in a hurry: doubtlessly.

Rightly so, to a certain extent, as creations of the nature giving birth to mysteries and beauties, and especially indirectly, through the mediation of the sculptor's hand who can be a being endowed with creator Holy Ghost. The marble of the stone worked by Michelangelo, by Brancusi, by Houdon, it isn't a simple marble or stone, but it is spiritualized material. At Magura one can clearly see that the stone can accommodate the ghost, that the stone can be the Ghost's host. Spread like the stars on the sky or like the projectiles inside the Gauss bell, strayed by a savant and nimble calculation of the probabilities on the stretch of a vast meadow at an edge of the forest and among the trees which are sculptural themselves, these carved stones compose a galaxy both self-standing and interpenetrated by the surrounding environment, as also a spectacle whose fantastic immediately grabs any looker who is not locked up in insensitiveness and in the desire for intentionally resist the magic of the border-area between myth, legend, and spirit. This scenography is insomuch

naturally made stupefying and consummate, totally unexpected and seemingly fallen from different possibilities of combining the elementary particles, that it is hard to believe that the performance is really unveiling to the eye which is in the first place perplex and then it becomes insatiable.

The cosmic Christianity which Mircea Eliade loved referring to, here is being materialized and it becomes actuality. One could say that we are suddenly transplanted in the old pre Indo-European Europe, in the forests of the mythology, on cyclopes' realms, in Neolithic, in some abrupt metamorphosis of the Stonehenge, among the Pelasgians whom Nicolae Densusianu believed in, in a Nibelung-pre-Homeric era, in an Europe more widely opened towards gentleness, towards nature, and towards contemplation, than that Europe ulterior to the scattering of the Arian peoples. Isn't Magura, who can tell it, that place where sang, danced, or thought Orpheus, Dionysus, or Pythagoras, the realm in which content officiated more strongly and more fiery in heart the first servants of Phoebus-Apollon, and hadn't been this a starting ramp for the daemon which firstly dwelled in the soul – full of dialectical and shaking wisdom of the human thought's coordinates, a though always lazy in saving the things of the mind – the Athenian Socrates?

The Magura's sculptures are so charming, to solid, to mysterious, yet full of surprises, of allusions, of allegories, of metaphors, and of *hinting* to something else, to depths, to heights, to *fascinosum* and to *misterium*. In their immediate vicinity there is a settlement seemingly integrated, symbolized, comprising, and signifying all of the sculptures. Forever and instantaneously conveying them a sole breath. The cross of Ciolacu Monastery is the sign which all the deeds lead to, and to him who tarries in looking more attentively at, and who is more intended not to reject the immediate meaning, it will be unveiled to him that the crafted stoned of Magura are but stories, preparations, presentiments, and fore-imaginings of the Cross which is to them a (mathematic) monument of convergent meeting, of re-embodiment, and of finality; namely an Omega point.

The cross includes them (overwhelming them) and it embraces them, and it recapitulates them, I would say, it gives them impulse, pulsation, a common denominator, a meaning, a ground, by transforming them is equally numerous altar stones and road towards one – known only by them – common purpose and wonderful fulfillment. In this way are intertwined the sacred and the prophane (the so-called prophane isn't but the attenuating and smooth hypostasis of another term of the couple, of the fearsome and fierce "sacred"), in a reflection of the same Tabor's light.

Examples of such hinting at the great mystery are, indubitably, in the numerous of the worshipping (knowingly or unknowingly) carved stones. In *The Father and the Son* – by George Apostu, in *The Plain Flower* of Alina Enache, or in *The Flower of the Hill* by Elod Kocsis, in *Welcoming and Water-Spring Stone* by Gheorghe Coman, in *Altar for the Unknown Hero* by Dumitru Pasima, in *Sign* by Antoaneta Andrei, or in *The Snail* of Mihai Buculei, or in *The Day and the Night* of Cristian Dedivan, or in *The Vigil* of Liliana Axinte. But not all the details of this distinct art works and not even the integrality of each one of them, it justifies and it homologates the character as vector towards the cross which I am discovering it (and which I am glad to be able to proclaim it) in the sculpture from Magura; but their totality it seems to us as owning a meaning and fulfilling the role as signifier; their ensemble (including the forest), the spaces between units and their subtle horsing around, with the variety of the distances, with the diversity of the grouping, with the charming play of the unpredictable, with the absolute freedom of the marginal itineraries, with the divine ease of composing the general plan, that is the one powerfully girdling, deciding, and transubstantiating the sculpture camp (of artistic creation) in the prophecy and in the prolegomena (or porch) of the neighboring dwelling place. The cosmic Christianity, the sun source of megaliths, the intuitions, and the discoveries of the ancient mentality achieve, thus, concreteness and they herald the Sunrise from Above and the light of the knowledge.

Far from reckoning the closeness of Magura to Ciolacu Monastery (exemplarily clean, so harmoniously proportioned, as itself the ensemble of diverse buildings describing a circle-ellipse not lacking some meta-architectonic background plans, and object of special care from the Buzau Archbishopric and of its chief His Eminence Bishop Epifanie Norocel), as haphazardly or as a happy happening, I delight myself with the certitude that they are next to one another as two modes of contemplation, the noumenal meaning of the two tangents only apparently submitted to the caprices of to the capricious laws of the hazard. Between Ciolacu and Magura the relationships are not only of spatiality but also of resonance, of reciprocity, of diachrony; after all, they belong to teleology: the second one leads towards the first one, it confers it its orant beauties in order to be blessed and anointed with the almightiness of the wood which was sacrificed on The One Who is dressed in adornments before emperors and Whose last attribute was described by Dostoyevsky in plain words as being the conquering, the absolute beauty. Isn't this another face, another name of the love guaranteed by Saint Apostle Paul

as being the only one lasting after the passing and the perdition of the existences?

And if, by damming the temporal, ideational, structural filiation between the museum-camp and the fulfillment-monastery, I am letting myself to be carried beyond the separation line of the genres and of the together-travelling-with-us horizon, I am baling the excesses of my fiction faculty and I am asking not to be the forgiveness denied to me, for I am voicing with good and steadfast faith some impressions felt from the first moments of the contact with two miracles, and I am supposing that it is my duty to confess them as they were.

## A DROP OF BLOOD

In his last and quite recent book - *Le choix de Dieu* (1987) – cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger, the archbishop of Paris, he quotes the words about which Blaise Pascal says that they were uttered him by Christ during the night of his great mystical ecstasy, on 23rd of November, the year 1654. Christ, as Pascal recounts, told me: out of My blood spilled by Me on the cross, a drop was for you.

In the *Cogitations* of the great philosopher, scientist, and theologian, we find out: "I was thinking at you during My agony, I shed that certain drop of blood for you". The commentaries usually cite the text from *The Gospel according to Saint Luke*, chapter no. 22, verse no. 24.

Pascal, as J. M. Lustiger thinks, he didn't hear Christ well, of course. Christ couldn't tell Pascal that I shed *a drop* (or a few drops) of My blood for you. Christ couldn't but tell him: I have given *all* my blood for you, all My human body, all My sweat, all the suffering.

(And truly so, Christ isn't The One to bestow only small pieces, measuring them, being cheap. When Christ gives, He gives line an emperor to him who is worthy of His mercy and His love isn't mere tip, or a bribe, of a penny pulled out of His purse with trembling hands; He bestows abundantly, hundredfold, thousandfold, and disproportionately; to those from the eleventh hour like to those from the first hour, grace upon grace, He doesn't reward sapiently and calculably, by any means, but He does it enthusiastically and in an exalted manner, by inviting to the imperial Dinner or to hosting the Holy Trinity in the house of the blessed one!).

In the nature of Christ, as Jean-Marie Lustiger insists, it wasn't and it isn't to tell: I have given you a drop of My blood, but only: I have given Myself to you wholly. Christ has given on Himself to all of us *wholly*; whole ands to each of us entirely, to each individual not a drop of His blood but the whole His unseparated and undivided suffering, as a block, unfragmented, unpassed through our numerative and measurement systems. (To the question: but how can He give on Himself to so many billions of people? We can answer, equally naively, thus: but then how can He distribute His blood, which is limited too, in countless billions of droplets? Or, rationally and sapiently: doesn't He bestow in Himself wholly and infinitely in the Holy Eucharist?). To each individual the whole blood and the whole suffering, but also the whole victory of the Holy

Resurrection, the whole apotheosis, the whole redemption, the whole defeat of the darkness's powers, the whole liberation!

What does it turn out from here? – asks J.-M. Lustiger. And he finds an admirable answer, one of a simplicity, of a logic, of a daring that can stir up only our bewilderment and our boiling within your timid and lukewarm souls, and answer that is a *Te Deum*, a victory cry, an echo of the words: "And you will know the truth and the truth will make you free" (Jn. 8: 32). Once Christ has given on Himself to us wholly, that means that each of us has the right to the whole Christ. But as long as we have the right to the whole Christ, it turns out that – for He is the Master, the Pantocrator, The One Who created all the things, Alpha and Omega, the Restorer, the Redeemer, the Recapitulatory – that we have the right to *all the things* and to *the whole*. So said the French high priest. We have, consequently, in the first place, the incontestable and legitimate right to: *freedom*, *happiness*, *free choice*, *accountability*, *hope*. (The freedom of choosing between good and evil, the right for asking to be and for being treated justly, the right to know, according to the formulation from *The Old Testament* - Proverbs 25: 21: "the glory of God is to hide the tings, and the glory of the emperors[55] it to study the things in details, the freedom if that of being fully accountable for the things we've done or not, the right to hope that we will be saved, that this hope, regardless how daring, it is not denied to us or limited by a previous destining decision).

To all of these – mainly – we have the right, and we have it wholly and eminently (in a feudal juridical meaning).

The Christian, in the virtue of the cherished blood spilled by Christ on the cross for the Christian, he rejoices of all the essential rights. Nobody can take those right aways from him – as so well showed Bishop Bartolomeu of Râmnic when they discussed in Parliament the article no. 5 of the former Constitution from the year 1923 -, contested, or limited, or plucked away. These rights aren't only natural, but they are also holy, sanctified by their supra-natural origine. The Christianity has especially the right for takin very seriously the human condition (equally prophane and sacred, material and spiritual, fallen and redeemed) and its cosmical vocation (of spiritualizing the cosmos), likewise the right to duty of being reckoned and of reckoning himself as corresponding in everything he does.

[55] Here "emperor" is synonymous to "man". The man, the emperor of the creation.

This is for, as it has been rightly said, we are strangers and travelers on this earth, strangers and travelers but not *tourists*[56], we have also the right (and, of course, correlatively, we have also the duty) for taking seriously all the things from the world where our salvation of damnation are being decided, all its problems, our calling to spiritualize the cosmos. We cannot afford to ourselves to be indifferent to the phenomenality, as we also are not allowed to be disinterested in our future. We are deeply involved in the things of this world where Christ embodied Himself, a world for which He shed his blood, He endured the mockery, the defamation, the torments, and the death.

The Blood of Christ not only that washed us up of sins, but it also ennobled us, he consecrated us (again, and more comprising than at the Genesis 1: 28) as masters of the earth and of the universe (Jn. 14: 2): "in the house of My Father there are many dwelling places"; Apocalypse 21: 6: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end", in total and unparalleled freedom, which is a terrible responsibility.

As such, in the name of a Christianity wrongly understood, bigoted or ill-willed, wrongly interpreted or assimilated, one cannot deny our right to freedom, to knowledge, to happiness (so limpidly unveiled as a capital Christian faculty by men as Dodtoyevsky, Albert Camus, François Mauriac), or to deny us the hope for being us saved.

When it comes about Christ, the droplets and the bits and the hesitations, the limits and the fears or the narrowness and the details, the turnings back have nothing to do with. Everything is on life and death, on goats and of sheep, on yes or no, on *wholes*. Pascal himself, a precursory of the cybernetics and a theoretician of the gambling, this binary and solemn conclusion, handling only big numbers, I am convinced that he wouldn't have disliked it.

Christ, as Pascal and the honorable lords from Port Royal should have understood it, He is too generous, He is too noble, and He is too paradoxical to be suspected (meaning: blasphemed) that He would want parsimoniously – Him! – only the salvation of His chosen ones. It falls to us the fearsome task not to disappoint The One Who is always ready to come running towards us, to embrace us, and to kiss us.

[56] Apud Simone Weil (this Platonist with an unfulfilled vocation): The things (in the widest meaning of this term) which we are tied to are unreal and illusory (maya); but the chains tying us to them are perfectly real.

## DEMONISM AND SECULARITY

Either it was about the country of the Gadarenes or of the Gergesenes, or about one of two demonized men, the evangelical text of the day (it appears in three variants at Mt. 8: 28-34; Mk. 5: 1-19; Lk. 8: 26-39) it evokes, I reckon, five fundamental ideas.

*The first idea*: A man's soul values more than a heard of pigs, be it even of two thousand pigs. The salvation of a man is infinitely more valuable than any material value, regardless hos important.

Some people asked: why did Christ allowed the devils to enter those pigs? Didn't He foreknow that those animals were to throw themselves in that lake's water and they were to die? Didn't our Lord lack His foreseeing and didn't He show Himself as indifferent?

The answer cannot be but: The Lord knew very well what was to happen. He intentionally allowed the perdition of those pigs in order to be strongly affirmed the greater price of a human soul than the price of numerous animals.

*The second idea*: The fear is a cause for banishing Christ away. When the Gergesenes (Lk. 8: 37) are "engulfed by a big fear", what do they do? "They ask Christ to leave them". Therefore, the first effect of the fear is that of banishing Christ away, of rejecting Him. Our Lor always taught His disciples and followers not to be fearful: do not fear! He tells them, do not be fearful! Why are you fearful? Do not be scared! Dare, I have overcome the world.

In *Apocalypse* (21: 8) the fearful are the first mentioned among those destined to the pond of fire and sulphury.

The fear is a sin, and the courage is a Christian virtue. There couldn't have been otherwise in a religion whose Founder valiantly died on the cross.

*The third idea*: From the evangelical texts we understand that the demons know Christ, they know as clearly as possible Who He is; Son of the All-High God (Mt. 8: 29; Mk. 5: 7; Lk. 8: 28). Does it turn out from here that the devils too are Christians for knowing and recognizing Christ and the Son and the Holy of God? Of course not, though it would seem so. The demons know (in other words: they believe) Him and they fear Him. But the knowledge and the fear aren't enough for conferring the quality as Christian. In order to somebody be found worthy of being called Christian, one needs two more features: the love and the obedience. One must love Christ and do Hi will, to fulfill His commandments, to strive with the whole his power to fulfill His

commandments exactly. Only the love and the obedience compose *together* the proof of the Christendom.

*The fourth idea*: it is related to the answer given by the demon to Christ's question: what is your name? The answer being (Mk. 5: 9): "legion (or army) it is my name, for we are numerous". (The military Roman legion, it is a known fact, had 5-6000 men).

It turns out from here that if we allow a single sin to take over our body and soul, in other words if we allow a single demon to enter inside our being, we will be lost. That unique demon will multiply, and it will proliferate (as they say in medical language); a great multitude of devils will come upon us in a rushing in, as a crowd, as a deluge. The sins and the devils will multiply just like the pathogen microbes penetrating our body, making us ill, because of dwelling in a favorable environment.

The multiplication of the devils and our getting under their control, it can be also likened to the drug addict enslaved to a hallucinogenic. Either that drug is hashish, morphine, cocaine, or heroin, the result is the same: the addiction to that drug. The physicians call it addiction, but speaking plainly we can call it as enslavement. There will be people saying: but if a try it, out of curiosity, only once, and then I will stop using the drug?

But it is not so! This is because the drug immediately causes the addiction, the body's cells will intertwine with the respective drug, and the body will ask for it increasingly frequently and demandingly, in ever bigger quantities. Reached in this state, the drug addict resorts to all means in order to obtain the substance that he is enslaved to: he will steal, he will even kill, he will commit any lawlessness. And the detoxification is extremely long, hard, panful, expensive, and aleatory: it doesn't yield, by and large, but partial and temporary results; Soon, the drug addict will again fall under the empire of the drug and he will spend his life in a detoxification hospital (infinitely worse and more lugubrious than any prison) and short periods of tormented lingering in the world of the healthy and unchained by the devils people.

*The fifth idea*: The danger of the demonism. Dostoyevsky, in his book *The Demons*, Thomas Mann in his book *Docktor Faustus*, and Heimito von Doderor in a book bearing titled the same as Dostoyevsky's, they limpidly demonstrate the existence of the demon which most of the people or our century refuse to believe in: I believe in God, yeas, but in demons… and they smile.

They are wrong and they delude themselves. The demonism, woe, it is a reality. On the plan of the public life it is manifested on two extremes, in two precipices: either the tyranny of the power, the dictatorship, the oppression,

the totalitarianism, or the transformation of the liberty in insanity, inf debauchery, in anarchy. Both extremes are unnatural, dangerous, and demonic. Righteous and expiator is only the middle path, or the right-reckoning, of the equilibrium. If the freedom becomes anarchy the state will need to intervene for restoring the order and it will do it with the coercive measures at its disposal, meaning that the citizens will be governed with the lash, exactly as the animals, as some pigs they have become pigs willingly, and the pigs do not know the freedom and they don't need it.

It is constantly checked during history, how right was the great journalist Maurice Jauriou, who wrote: if the morals are banished away, the freedom too will be banished away. These words should be a teaching to the young people who maybe do not understand why the debauchery and the disorder are contrary to freedom and why the morals are an essential condition for freedom's existence.

The pigs! The entire evangelical text from today seems to refer to them, namely to swirl around them!

And rightly so, there is one more evangelical text speaking about pigs, a text representing to us a practical value. In *the Gospel according to Saint Apostle Matthew*, in the chapter no. 7, the serve no. 6, there is a phrase well known to everybody: "Do not give the holy things to the dogs, neither throw your pearls before the pigs, lest they will trample on those and, by turning back, they will shred you". Most of the people quite this in a truncated manner: do not throw your pearls in front of the pigs. But Christ didn't utter only that, but he completed: lest they will trample on those and, by turning back, they will shred you.

Exactly so proceed the people too. This is because the people are divided din humans and in non-humans. The last ones reward the good done to them by attacking and defying their benefactors. That's why are need much attention. It is not sapient us to allow to be deceived, mocked, and exploited by non-humans. The kindness and the generosity must not be confounded to blindness, stupidity, or naiveness. The naiveness, as Léon Daudet said, it is good and nice at children. But it is inappropriate to mature people and to elderly people, who owe to be intelligent, wise, prudent, guided by what our churchly texts call it so pertinently: watchfulness.

Never the kindness and the generosity must become that pitiful and absurd weakness allowing the inhuman people to trample the holy things and the pearls.

The conclusions one can draw out of the evangelical text from today are, I think, four in number. We see that our Lord asks requests us:

1. To place the souly ones (spiritual) above the material or bodily things. Christ doesn't condemn the material things, the Christianity isn't Manicheist, it doesn't reckon the matter as cursed. But, without any doubt, it is needed a hierarchization: in the first place the spiritual ones, and then the material things. Firstly, the salvation of the demonized, and then after the care for the pigs heard;

2. We must love Him and confess Him with a loud and high voice, and not to reject Him or to get ashamed of Him, lest he will be forced on the day of the Final Judgment to reject us and to be ashamed of us. The inward faith, regardless how sincere and hot, it isn't enough, so that in order us to be saved we must confess our Lord "with our mouth" (Rom. 10: 10);

3. We must be intelligent (not stupid, not blind, not naïve) and courageous (the fear being not only shameful but also sinful);

4. We must be aware anytime of the possible demonization of our soul.

Dortoyevsky, in his books titled *The Demons* and *The Karamazov Brothers* – which are not only all-beautiful novels, but they are also books of Christian teaching (which I for one do not shy placing them immediately after the *Holy Gospels* and *The Writings of the Holy Fathers*) – he described powerfully and as convincing as possible (and prophetically) three types of demonized: Nikolai Vsevolodovici Stavroghin, Piotr Stepanovici Verhovenski, and Ivan Feodorovici Karamazonv. Prophetically appear, really so, these portraits described more than a hundred years ago in that world of the end of the end of our century, which the terrorist, the concentration camps, and the torture seemed to proliferate in, no less than the demons and the microbes mentioned before.

Wh9ich are the visible characteristics of the demonism? Mainly two: the cold sadism and the gratuitous evilness. The sadist doesn't need fine meals, neither drink, nor money, neither bodily satisfaction. Only one thing can satisfy the sadist and rejoice him: the suffering of his neighbor, seeing his neighbor suffering, and agonizing for a long time before dying. The common sinner steals, denounces, kills, it deceives invoking certain (wicked) logical motivation: living a better life, eating, drinking, earning more money etc. But the sadist works *disinterested*, he doesn't seek a material profit, the only voluptuousness he is able to taste is the spectacle of the suffering of another, a spectacle which he watches indifferently at, with a frozen heart.

Indifferently and frozen! Dante in his *Inferno* supposes that in hell, besides flames of fire, boiling water, and melted tar, there is an immense core that is a block of ice. There, in the center of the hell, there are forever dwelling Brutus and Cassius, the murderers of Caesar (Dante was a moderate Ghibelline), as also Judah. The soul of the sadist, of the demonized, it is like a block of ice. His evilness is gratuitous: he doesn't pursue a personal satisfaction but only to obtain the delightful spectacle: the as complete as possible suffering of his fellow human.

Christ tells us in the Apocalypse (3: 20): "Lo, I am standing at the door and knocking; if somebody hears My voice and he opens the door, I will enter and I will dine together with him and he with Me". But not only our Lord Christ stands at our door; there stay the devils too, stalking, just to seize the moment and sneak within our would through that open door. If it happens that we do not guar our door, fi we let that door open even a little, the devils with rush in and we will get under their mastery.

Let's pay attention: let's guard with watchfulness and prudence the door of our soul. Let's not open this door but to our Lord, and never and not ever for a little, to the devils (not even for a second), because even that would allow them to sneak in and to proliferate. May God guard us against such situation, which is more dreadful than any misfortune that can happen to us!

## DIVERSE THOUGHTS

I try to use the title from above for translating the French word *Variétés*, used by Paul Valery, in order to specify the way in which the people extoll our Lord Christ. Being God infinite, it is totally natural He to appear countless to us also the number of the paths in which we show our love, our trust, and our devotion to Him. Being the things like this, it is a given fact that the modalities mentioned in continuation do not have a limitative character at all, but they are strictly exemplifying.

We extoll Christ, firstly, by committing the deeds mentioned by Himself in the text referring to the Final Judgment (Mt. 25: 35-36): giving to the hungry to eat, giving to the thirsty to drink, hosting the strangers, dressing up the naked, visiting the sick, and visiting the people in prison.

Likewise, by believing without doubting and by proclaiming as He said, that He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

By fasting, by praying, by taking vigils, by giving alms, by restraining on ourselves.

And also by forgiving our mistaken, by banishing away from us the keeping in our mind of the evil done to us, by loving our neighbor (and not only by loving our neighbor but also by tolerating him as he is, by not asking him to be like we are, or else contesting him any right, even the right to live), by blessing (or, if that is impossible to us, at least not cursing) our enemies.

By proving ourselves gentle and meek in heart, peace makers, non-quarrelling, non-haughty, preserving and clean thought, by applying and even exceeding (according to the Lord's word: Mt. 5: 20 and the followings) the ten commandments, by reconciling ourselves with our accusers.

By committing the good secretly, by getting ourselves angry only for a very short time and not remaining so later than sunset, by being always ready to forgive and to appease, by not excessively worrying ourselves because of the world's and of the body's things. By making on ourselves mute and deaf when we are accused, by not accepting the temptation for rebuking and reproaching when we feel that we are right, by not judging anyone (which is such a meritorious but difficult to achieve virtue).

By not fearing, by banishing away our fear, by reckoning our fear as a deadly sin (Apoc. 21: 8), as the plague of the world, by daring, by always manifesting manhood and valiance.

By hosting travelers, by not following the example of the people from Bethlehem, who didn't find even a small dwelling place for the Mother of the

lord and they let the oxen to warm them up (Her and the Newly-Born) with their gentle and friendly breath, by helping the weak – the Scripture usually presents the weak under the generic: widows and orphans. By welcoming joyfully the Lord's servants, by not asking (with hypocrite unbiased and with cunning wisdom) signs and miracles, by not tempting our Lord with reckless, ridicule, or cheeky requests.

By not being us formalists, observers of the letter, lost in details, by not placing the letter above the law, by not getting us scandalized that the Lord heals the sick on Saturday, by knowing that Jesus is Lord of the Saturday too.

But by looking at the things, on each time, with a wide and tolerant spirit, by succeeding to get out of ourselves, by seeing on ourselves, by judging and appreciating on ourselves *from outside*, as it would catch us (photographing us) the cold and unexpected sight of a third person.

By not accepting us to be slaves to passions (so that us to avoid becoming mockery to the devils), but neither to the texts. And by avoiding at all costs the stubborn and obtuse literal exegeses.

By not allowing the richness (or the lust for getting rich of the love for money which can dwell in the poor one too) to dominate us, by putting the whole our trust in the temporary things: "You fool! Even during this night, I will ask your soul from you". By making out of the relativity's law the principle of incertitude and the doctrine of the instability of the worldly realities, the threefold ground for an instinctive reflex when they trye to subjugate us with their shininess.

By not envying (let the parable with the hirelings to the vineyard being present within our mind in order us not to cede to the ugly temptation so spread and persevering in our subconscious. By not staring at our fellow humans, at their mistakes, and at their unavoidable human shortcomings, but let's rather look at our own shortcomings (the straw and the beam – with the observation that even there is not beam in my eye, my own straw is incited by another whom my narrow horizon and my incapacity of conceiving something different makes it a beam).

By not mocking God's name. By multiplying our talent or our talents of our fraction of a talent. By not proving ourselves as petty and haters, by quarreling, for instance, that the chrism poured on our Lord's head was a waste.

By not allowing the tribulation, the persecution, the worries of the present age, the deceit of the wealth and the lust to chock up the fructification of the Word within us. By not being scared (as the Gadarenes were) of Christ's

power, by being steadfast in our faith, by not invoking diverse pretexts (even honest and rational) in order not to answer our Lord's calling upon us.

By letting the innocence of the childhood to water our soul and to heal it of its dry respectability, just like Zacheus who, a grown-up man, he wasn't' ashamed of climbing that tree in order to better seeing on Christ.

By taking vigil, by keeping ourselves awake, by not trusting our strength, by knowing that our ghost is zealous but our body is helpless, and we are at any time capable of weakness and of falling (didn't the Blessed Filip Neri say: take me Lord by my ears because otherwise I will sell you like Judah did?).

By being us grateful (not by resembling us to the nine healed lepers who went in their way, but to the tenth one who turned back to thank), by loving our Lord with the whole our heart, with the whole our thought, with the whole our soul, and with the whole our virtue.

By avoiding to hesitate and by imposing to ourselves to be steadfast in our decisions.

By fighting our covetousness (a minor sin having a naïve countenance, but it is an insidious one).

By non-idolatrizing the perishing things, not even the virtues, but only One God. Reckoned one by one, separately, and not together and under the care of the Ghost, the virtues can become obsessions if not even temptations and idols' images, as sometimes happens to the Protestants and to the Neo Protestants. Then the virtues become blind forces and, by defying the right-reckoning, they reach to cause aberrations. Being wise (as the snakes, not only kind as the pigeons) it is not enough – and this is proven by the parable of the faithless steward, by giving prominence when we are in a dilemma, to the monastic feature of the right-reckoning. By being us tireless in prayer (the persevering widow and the unfair judge), and patient.

By steadfastly believing the Word of Jesus (Jn. 4: 50) and by keeping His word (Jn. 8: 51), by eating and by drinking at the tight time the All-Pure and the All-Cherished Blood of the Lord, by thoroughly taking heed at: how happy we are for being found worthy of such a great thing, for never a man spoke like Christ speaks (Jn. 7: 46), and that we can call ourselves as His friends. By attentively reading *The Old Testament* and by understanding its prophetic value and consequently by understanding that those who do not venerate *The Old Testament* and who do not believe its prophecies are not Christians.

By praying, by fasting, by taking vigil, by giving alms – necessarily. But also by simple good words or gesture of compassion, as there would be the words uttered by the good thief to Jesus (which were not only shaking, or a

confession, but they were also comforting, as an act of compassion, of solidarity, and - I am daring to say – of encouragement, by showing to the Crucified that He was not surrounded only by enemies, by blasphemers, and by mockers, but there was a man standing next to Him who *understood* what was happening there on Golgotha), or the so gentle and humble gesture of Veronica.

By uttering such good words or by committing such gesture also to our fellow humans, as simple people, on the most random and unimportant occasions, by not shying of being us polite, by benevolently smiling even to a stranger, for instance to the individual who unwillingly bumped into us, and then he apologizes, and by getting out hat off when saluting on somebody, by taking our time to answer a question asked to us or for giving the asked directions – small and prophane things, but not trivial ones! But belonging to the category of those who exceed the strict justice and, consequently, they are pleasant to Christ: He hasn't come to break the Law but to fulfill it and what does it mean fulfilling if not deepening, refining, asking for more, desiring the consummation, and drawing more subtle consequences?

By being us modest, by being us aware of the limits of our psychosomatic being, by proportioning the sleep and the prayer so that we will never doze at prayer (the intransigents should rather read the declarations done in the book published by Father Ioanichie Balan – titled *Spiritual Dialogues* – by Father Teofil Paraian from Brancoveanu Monastery - Sambata de Sus).

By bringing to the Lord those gifts which we are able to bring: gold, myrrh, and incense, or only anointing Him with chrism or washing up His feet, or at least giving Him water for Himself to wash His hands and feet (like, woe to him, Simon the Leper didn't do it).

Or – as the shepherds did – by whistling, for the *magi travels like the snow* and *the angels with the shepherds extol*, for any impulse of the heart is accepted and the shepherds didn't know what else superior to do and because they had not wealth, but they proved their love and their joy by whistling, and there is no doubt that their spontaneous and glad and poor whistle had been accepted.

As also had been accepted also the tricks of the clown from Notre Dame (from the novella of Anatole France), that one who in the evening, after a day long of toiling and somersaults, he enter the great cathedral, he get out of his bag some clown tools and starts swallowing fire and he does all sorts of tumbles in front of the icon of the Holy Mother with the child in Her arms, and that offends the parishioner who is preparing to banish the clown away, but he

sees the All-Pure Mother descending from the icon and wipes off of sweat the forehead of the clown with Her own scarf, while the Child laughs and claps His hands.

Because all of us are, in a way or another, the clown from Notre Dame and for all of us extol Christ not only according to our grace, our power, and out skillfulness, according to our style, as Blaga would say.

And Father Brown of G. K. Chesterton unties the entangled police problems and oh! only if the good God will find all of us worthy of equally much cleanness and zeal as the shepherds from around the cave from Bethlehem!

And we also extol our Lord by inviting to dinner all the disregarded people, not only the poor ones but by and large all the people who do not benefit of the attention and of the honoring form their fellow humans, those forgotten or forsaken: to those we ought to prove gentleness, decency, and solicitude.

Through acts of courage, of valiance, by making to ourselves– it is good to keep repeating this - a rule, a law, and a creed out of reckoning the fear as a big and grave sin.

Through any kind (regardless how unexpected or nonconformist) good deed, through gratuitous joy, peace, serenity, reconcilement, bonhomie analogue to that of the all-Christian character of Dickens, the immortal lord Pickwick (Dostoyevsky place him on the same level with the hero of Cervantes.

By visiting the people persecuted by the men in power of the day (at least during at night, secretly, as Nicodemus did).

By stopping on ourselves form committing sins, by becoming true Christians, regardless what we were before our awakening, regardless which ugly and disgusting sins we were dirtied before with (as archbishop Becket, the ones murdered in the altar at the order of the English King Henry II – his former comrade of parties – because once ordained as hierarch he no longer wanted to continue the former friendships and straying), according to the text from 1 Cor. 6: 11.

By kissing the ground, without a reason, out of euphoria and ecstasy, as Alyosha Karamazon.

By fighting the windmills, driven by the thought of helping the persecuted people, as Don Quixote (*El Nuestro Señor Don Quijote* as the Spaniards call him *El Christo Ezpañol*).

By writing, by painting, or by composing (they who can do it) masterpieces. All have been and they are created only in the state of the grace of the saints (Saint Justin: “All the things thought by philosophers and by

legislators, they thought those things and they told them beautifully, they elaborated those things grace to that part of the Logos dwelling within them" – this is a quote from Priest Professor G. I. Coman, *Patrology*, I, pg. 39).

By kissing the lepers, this term *leper* being understood in its most comprising meaning, as in *Kiss Given to the Leper* belonging to François Mauriac, or as equivalent to that *Geächtchen* about which wrote Ernst von Salomon: any isolated individual, persecuted, unjustly rebuked, of whom the wealthy, the well off, the fearful, the rich, the subservient fear of, that too is a leper and worthy of being kissed.

By refusing to stare at the one in suffering and in despair, by following the example given by James A. Balfour who confessed; I make to myself an imperative out of not staring at who is, in my presence, in an embarrassing situation or in a despaired state (that which implies my disgust of and my amazement at all the spectators who rush in to capital executions, to tortures, to burnings at stake etc.).

By praying as we know, even though we don't perfectly know the typicon of the prayers (and we maybe don't know even *Our Father*, as in the story with the three hesychasts on an island who didn't know this prayer but they walked on the sea).

By believing that Jesus is Christ, as Peter and Martha and Daniel and the blind from birth and the Samaritan woman confessed Him…, by fulfilling the will of the Father (Jn. 1: 49), by letting everything behind and unattended in order to follow to Christ (as the fishermen John and James, and as the publican Matthew…).

By listening to His word as Mary did, but also by serving Him at the table as Martha and the Peter's mother-in-law did.

By not ceasing to reflect upon the truth that the basic ideas of the teaching of Christ are two: the love (Jn. 13: 24 and 15: 12-13) and the freedom (Jn. 8: 31-32).

By not sparing our time, by tarrying as the merciful Samaritan man did, in order to come to the help of the injured, of the accidented, of the misfortunate.

By always remembering that within any fellow human of ours there dwells the breath of God, namely a bit of divine ghost (who is infinite so that the bit too is shared out of infinity). And by not behaving to our fellow human as such, by not mocking him, but not turning him in, by not selling him for a certain number of silver coins or for the unclean pleasure of seeing him suffering, by not following Judah's example.

This is because, otherwise, we will commit the sin (unforgivable) of blaspheming the Holy Ghost Who dwells within any man: by rebuking our neighbor (let's not wonders anymore that our Lord destines to the judgment of the synedrium those who tell to their brother: you worthless, and he destines to Gehenna those who tell to their neighbor: you insane one!), the mocking of the One from the Cross (as the hierarchs, the chieftains, the scribes, the soldiers, and the passersby did; Mt. 27: 39-43;; Mk. 18: 29; Lk. 23: 35), the giving in the hands of his persecutors of the one who is seeking refuge, the grimace directed to the suffering of another, the joy provided by the neighbor's trouble (the Germans call this *Schaudenfreude*, the heart's callousness, the callousness of the thought the haughty bureaucracy, the stupid indifference or the cruel withdrawal within oneself when it comes about the need for helping our neighbor.

The enumeration, as I said it, it is purely exemplificatory. Let nobody be worried: to anybody it is at any time given – not only on heroic moments – to confess God. And maybe this daily confession, in modest and unimportant circumstances, it is by no means easier that that done on heroic moments which not all of us can be partakers to (on this truth tarried the Blesses Theresa of Lisieux). Let's not deceive on ourselves by thinking that because we had not occasion for martyrdom, we wouldn't have how to confess our Lord Who is present not only in heavens but on earth as well, or in the depths of the sea, but also in each instance and at any step of the usual life. The Veronica's veil, the buffoon from Notre Dame, the banal willing smile of somebody, the warm words told to the troubled man are enough to convince us that we are ceaselessly invited with the possibility of recognizing and of proving ourselves as diverse and steadfast disciples of Jesus Chrit.

**Beloved Father Justin[57],**

In an extraordinary text belonging to the French poet Henri Michaux – I have recently come across to – it is about a candidate to monasticism who confesses to the abbot of the monastery where he would want to be accepted: you know, Father, that I have no faith, no light, no essence, no trust in myself, and neither do I believe that it will be possible to help myself, let aside helping others. I have nothing.

The abbot answers:

It doesn't matter! You don't have faith, but by giving it to others, you will have it too. By searching for the faith for somebody else, you will achieve it. On this brother, on your neighbor, you must help him with that what you don't have. Not out of your abundance, not out of your fewness, but out of that what you don't have. By bestowing to another that what you don't have – faith, light, trust, hope – you will achieve those for yourself.

"You mut help out of that what you don't have".

"By giving that what you don't have, you will achieve that what you have given to another".

Isn't that wonderful? Nowhere, except in the *Gospels*, in some of Dostoyevsky's texts, in some of the text from Don Quixote, and in the text of Casus on Oscar Wilde and about the going towards Christ not through suffering but by excess of happiness, it hasn't been said, I think, something more according to the teaching of Christ.

What Michaux says clarifies to us, maybe, more deeply, the text referring to the fearsome Judgment. You give to drink to the thirsty that water which you might not having too, you give to the hungry to eat the food that lack to you too, you dress up the naked with that clothing which you too crave for…

"En la donnant (la lumière), tu l'auras. En la cherchant nous un autre. Le frère à coré, il faut que tu l'aides aven ce que to n'as pas".

Isn't this the secret of the monastic life?

Lo the Christian paradox in the whole its fulness, power, and splendor.

Lo what Christ requires form us: what a great impossible absolute! You to give that what you don't have! But lo also the insane promise, rousing, shaking: by bestowing that what you don't have, you too will achieve that what you have bestowed; you, who have bestowed out of the void of your being. The supra-natural gift bestowed to another will be reflected upon yourself and it

[57] A letter sent from Bucharest by Father Nicolae Steinhardt, to the Rohia Monastery, to Father Justin († Justin Sigheteanul).

will fill yourself up, in will enrich you, it will transform you, it will Christianize you.

Of course! It couldn't have been otherwise! How were I so blind and stupid to that I could imagine that He asks us to give out of what we have – much of few? big deal! But He asks from us something else, He asks us the impossible: us to give that what we don't have. Like Himself, being God, He bestowed to us His death of a mortal.

And Claudel: What are you afraid of? I am the impossible who looks at you.

Let perish from within us any fear, any uncertainty, any despair: the monk is called to give to others the faith and the light even if he lacks those. And let him not worry: by bestowing he too will achieve those.

**Into the Lord,**
**Abba Nicolae**

**Brief Biography and Bibliography of Nicolae Steinhardt**

Nicolae Aurelian Steinhardt, born on 29th of July 1912, in Pantelimon commune, Ilfov Country, Romania, deceased on 30th of March 1989, in Baia Mare City, Romania. He was a Romanian writer, a literary critic, essayist, lawyer, and publicist. He was born as Jew, he converted himself to the Orthodox Christianity while he was inmate in Jilava Prison, he was tonsured a monk after being released from prison, his monastic name being Nicolae. He is the author of a writing that is unique in the Romanian literature. He had a PhD in constitutional law.

His father, Oscar Steinhardt, was an active participant to the WWI, he was wounded at Marasesti and he was granted the Military Virtue Order.

Nicolae Steinhardt published his first literary creations under the pseudonym Antihistus which was inspired by the name of a characters created by Jean de La Bruyère.

Nicola Steinhardt published (we are going to give the translation of the titles, because our project is destined to make Steinhardt known to the English speaker readers):

1934. *In the genre of... young people*. Bucharest: People's Culture Publishing House.

1935. *Essai sur la conception catholique du Judaïsme*. Bucharest: Romanian Culture Literature.

1937. *Illusion et réalités juives*. Paris: Librairie Lipschutz.

He undertook an intense journalistic activity. In the year 1940 he is sacked from his job as journalist during the actions of "ethnical purification", and between the year 1940-1944 was submitted to ethnical persecutions because of being a Jew. In the year 1944 is rehired as journalist, but in the year 1947 is sacked again because of a denouncement formulate by one of the greatest Romanian literary critics of all times: George Calinescu. The communist persecution had started and all the important intellectuals of the former capitalist regime started to be persecuted.

In the year 1947 he is also disbarred as lawyer, his texts are refused from being published, and between the years 1948-1959 he suffered of political persecution, while still not in prison.

In the year 1958 Steinhardt was arrested because of having been sympathizer of the Romanian fascist organization called The Iron Guard or The Legion, together with other defendants called as "mystic-legionaries". After a mockery of a trial, he was condemned to twelve years of forced labor, seven years of civil demotion, and total confiscation of his wealth, the legal accusation being: "crime of plotting against the social order".

He was Baptized as Orthodox Christian on 15th of March, the year 1960, while he was in Jilava Prison.

After being release from prison as a consequence of a general amnesty of all political prisoners, Steinhard published:

1980. *Literary Incertitudes*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

1982. *Geo Bogza, a Poet of the Effects, of the Exaltation, of the Grandiose, of the Solemnity, of the Exuberacne, and of the Pathetic*. Bucharest: Albatross Publishing House.

1983. *Critique at First Person*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

1987. *Layovers in Time and Space, or Beyond the Texts*. Bucharest: The Romanian Book Publishing house.

1988. *Through Others towards Yourself. New and Old Essays*. Bucharest: Eminescu Publishing House.

His posthumously published books are:

1991. *Journal of the Happiness*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

1991. *The Polyphonic Monologue*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

1992. *Bestowing You Will Achieve*. Baia Mare: The Publishing House of the Romanian Orthodox Bishopric of Maramures and Satmar.

1994. *Between Worlds*. (Dialogued with Nicolae Baciut). Targu-Mures. Tipomur Publishing House.

1995. *The Book of the Impartation*. Cluj-Napoca: Apostrophe Publishing House.

1995. *The Trip of a Profligate Son*. Adonai Publishing House.

1996. *In the Style of Cioran, Noica, Eliade…* Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.

1998. *The Monk from Rohia Monastery Answers 365 Questions*. (Interview with Steinhardt by Zaharia Sangeaorzan). Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.

2000. *The Temptation of the Reading*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

2000. *The Danger of the Confession*. (A dialogue with Ioan Pintea). Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

2000. *The Road to Hesychia*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

2000. *God Whom You Tell Me You Do Not Believe In*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House.

2001. *Myself and A Few Others*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia Publishing House.

2003. *Romanced Essay on Non-Success*. Iasi: The Time Publishing House.

Steinhardt had a prolific activity as translator. He translated from English to Romanian, from Romanian to French.

His works have been translated in several languages (French, Spanish, Portuguese, Hebrew), but not in English, until the present translation, this translation in the English language of Steinhardt's works being the first of its kind.